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Djokovic faces Alcaraz in high-stakes men's final

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

روزنامہ ساحل بنگلور

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State sets up SIT to probe CJ Roy 'suicide' case

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Bengaluru police have formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe real estate tycoon CJ Roy's suicide during an Income Tax search at his office. Commissioner of Police Seemanth Kumar Singh ordered the transfer of the investigation to the SIT, headed by Joint Commissioner C Vamshi Krishna. DCP Lokesh Jagalasar will be Investigating Officer, assisted by Central Division DCP Akshay Hake and senior officers. The team can induct additional officers as needed. Home Minister G Parameshwara said, "We will see what the findings are. I can't say anything right now till we find out what factors pushed him to that stage." Roy, in his late 50s, was found with gunshot injuries and declared dead at a hospital. *—PTI*

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Wangchuk hospitalised over stomach issues

JODHPUR, 31 JAN

Activist and scientist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been lodged in Jodhpur Central Jail since 27 September 2025, was taken to AIIMS Jodhpur on Saturday after complaining of stomach pain. AIIMS sources said Wangchuk has been suffering from stomach-related issues and had visited the hospital on Friday for tests. The Supreme Court, hearing a petition filed by his wife, has sought his medical report by 2 February. police took him to the AIIMS emergency department. A bench directed that he be examined by a specialist while jail authorities said doctors had examined him 21 times. *— PTI*

Catherine O'Hara, 'Schitt's Creek' star, dies at 71

LOS ANGELES, 31 JAN

Emmy-winning Canadian comedian Catherine O'Hara has died at 71 following a brief illness. Known for 'SCTV' and 'Schitt's Creek', she starred in "Home Alone" and won acclaim for Moira Rose. Her career began at Toronto's Second City with Eugene Levy. Hollywood roles included 'After Hours' and 'Beetlejuice'. Christopher Guest films such as 'Best in Show' showcased her comic talent. Culkin paid tribute, saying, "Mama, I thought we had time... I love you." Born in Toronto to a Catholic Irish family, she joined Second City in her 20s. O'Hara is survived by husband Bo Welch, sons Matthew and Luke, and siblings Michael, Mary Margaret, Maureen, Marcus, Tom and Patricia. *—PTI*

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Sunetra Pawar sworn in as Maharashtra DyCM

First M'rashtra woman DyCM takes over three portfolios

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Sunetra Pawar on Saturday was sworn in as the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra and was allotted excise, sports, minority development and Aukaf departments, but not finance and planning which her late husband Ajit Pawar held.

The brief swearing-in ceremony at the Lok Bhavan in Mumbai took place three days after Ajit, NCP president and a deputy chief minister in the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP `Mahayuti' government, died in an air crash in Baramati on 28 January.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis is likely to take over crucial the finance and planning department and present the budget next year.

Sunetra, 62, also resigned her Rajya Sabha membership. She is not a member of either house of the state legislature at present, and is expected to contest the byelection to the Baramati assembly constituency represented by her late husband.

The NCP had elected her as the new leader of its legislature wing earlier in the day.

Sunetra's younger son Jay and his wife, Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and NCP leaders Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and Chhagan Bhujbal were present at the ceremony where she was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Acharya Devvrat.

Sunetra Pawar, wife of Ajit Pawar, signs documents after taking oath as Maharashtra's first woman Deputy Chief Minister in, Mumbai, Saturday *—PTI*

> **I will continue to work tirelessly and honestly to realize (Ajit Pawar's) just, equality-based, and developed Maharashtra of his dreams.** —Sunetra Pawar, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister

Nobody from party patriarch and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar's family were present.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his best wishes to Sunetra, expressing confidence that she will work tirelessly for welfare of the people and carry forward her late husband's dream.

After taking the oath of office, Sunetra, vowed to carry forward her husband's people-centric legacy.

Sunetra's younger son Jay and his wife, Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and others were present at the ceremony where she was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Acharya Devvrat. *—PTI*

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NO IDEA ABOUT SWEARING IN, SAYS SHARAD

BARAMATI, 31 JAN

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday claimed he had "no idea" about the swearing-in of Sunetra Pawar, wife of Ajit Pawar, as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister

He added that that his late nephew had finalised 12 February to announce a merger between the NCP factions.

Addressing a press conference in Baramati, Sharad said that it was Ajit's wish to unite the NCP factions, and that they were optimistic about it.

"We didn't know about the swearing-in. We found out about it through news reports. I have no idea about the swearing-in," he said, when asked if anyone from the Pawar family would be attending the ceremony. "I didn't even know that it was scheduled for today. There was no discussion with me about the swearing-in."

The senior leader said that the NCP may have made the decision, and there had been no discussions with him.

The possible merger between the two factions is likely to stall, despite a high level meeting on Saturday. *—PTI*

Growth, mfg may get boost in FM's record Budget

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

UNION BUDGET 2026

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will on 1 February present her record ninth straight Budget, which is expected to unveil measures to sustain growth momentum, maintain fiscal discipline, and contain reforms that could buffer the economy from global trade frictions, including US tariffs.

The presentation of the Budget for April 2026 to March 2027 fiscal (2026-27) will be on Sunday, a first in independent India's history.

Sitharaman's sweeping income tax and GST cuts, together with spending on infrastructure and the RBI's interest rate reductions, have so far helped the Indian economy withstand the punitive 50 per cent tariff US President Donald Trump has imposed on Indian goods, the government has said. But now, she has to come up with measures to sustain the momentum.

However, the government faces pressure to stimulate consumption, support job creation and sustain capital expenditure while keeping the fiscal deficit on a downward trajectory.

Capital expenditure is expected to remain a key pillar, with continued focus on infrastructure sectors such as railways, roads, defence manufacturing, renewable energy and urban transport. Support for state-level infrastructure through interest-free loans is also likely to continue.

On the tax front, major changes are unlikely.

The Budget is also expected to highlight job creation through incentives for labour-intensive manufacturing, skilling and apprenticeships, alongside enhanced support for MSMEs. Measures supporting clean energy, green manufacturing and energy security are also likely to feature prominently, as the government balances growth priorities with fiscal prudence. *—PTI*

RYBAKINA WINS AUS OPEN

Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina won the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup in the women's singles final of the Australian Open tennis championship, in Melbourne. She beat Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka on Saturday *—PTI*

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4 migrant workers die of suffocation in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Four migrant labourers from Assam were found dead at their rented accommodation on the outskirts of the City in a suspected case of suffocation.

The deceased were identified as Jayant Shinde, Nirendranath, Doctor Tide, and Dhananjay Tide, all in their early 20s. Three of the deceased hailed from Namoni Borkhamukh village and the other from Salmora village in Assam's Lakhimpur district.

A preliminary investigation revealed that the deaths were allegedly caused by suffocation on 30 January due to carbon monoxide accumulation

while they were cooking rice on a stove, a senior police officer said.

The house reportedly had no ventilation, with the only window being closed.

The victims were employed in loading and unloading materials at a nearby warehouse.

The matter came to light after a friend visited the accommodation. When there was no response at the door, he tried to open the window from outside.

The bodies will be handed over to the families after post-mortem examinations.

Authorities are awaiting the autopsy report and forensic analysis to confirm the exact cause of death.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma condoled the death of the workers and said his government will coordinate with Karnataka for bringing home the bodies of the four youths.

Sarma said that he would speak with his Karnataka counterpart Siddaramaiah later in the day regarding the matter. *—PTI*

SEVERAL KILLED AS BLASTS ROCK IRAN: REPORTS

TEHRAN, 31 JAN

Several people were killed as blast were heard in Iran. It was unclear at the time of publishing what the exact toll was, but reports said that at least five people were killed and dozens injured.

The blasts occurred in the port city of Bandar Abbas, Ahvaz, Karaj, and the Parand neighbourhood of Tehran.

The explosion in Ahvaz was allegedly caused by a gas leak, Iran International reported.

Israeli officials told Reuters that their country was not involved in the blasts. It is unclear if the US was involved.

The blasts come as the US has been ramping up its military presence in the Gulf. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to strike Iran. Iran has vowed to retaliate if the US attacked. *—Agencies*

Trump named several times as 3M Epstein files released

NEW YORK, 31 JAN

The US' Justice Department released nearly 3 million pages of documents, 2,000 videos, and 1,80,000 images and from its investigative files on the late convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. The files show that US President Donald Trump had emailed the millionaire financier several dozen times and further detailed Epstein's interactions with others, including former president Bill Clinton.

The files, released under a law intended to reveal what the government knew about the millionaire financier's sexual abuse of young girls and his interactions with rich and powerful people, also contained multiple references to Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and referenced that Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates allegedly raped a man.

The records have thousands of references to Trump.

The files revealed that the FBI had received multiple complaints alleging sexual abuse against Trump. One file contained a reference that Trump allegedly raped a minor girl.

Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

MODI IN THE FILES?

India rejected a reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the files. Epstein wrote in an email that Modi took his advice and danced and sang on a stage in Israel in 2017. The MEA, however called it "ruminations". *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

200 killed in Congo mine collapse

GOMA, 31 JAN

A landslide earlier this week collapsed several mines at a major coltan mining site in eastern Congo, leaving at least 200 people dead, rebel authorities said on Saturday.

The collapse took place on Wednesday at the Rubaya mines, which are controlled by the M23 rebels, an official said. He said the landslide was caused by heavy rains.

Congo, torn apart by civil war, is a major supplier of coltan, a black metallic ore that contains the rare metal tantalum, a key component in the production of smartphones, computers and aircraft engines. *—PTI*

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WETLAND CONSERVATION

2 wetlands in UP, Gujarat get Ramsar tag

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah (Uttar Pradesh) and Chhari-Dhand in Kutch, Gujarat, have been recognised as Ramsar wetland sites, marking the unique ecosystems for conservation under a global framework.

The term Ramsar derives its name from the city of Ramsar in Iran where the Convention on Wetland was signed in 1971. It is an inter-governmental treaty on wetland conservation.

The Ramsar site is a globally recognised wetland biodiversity site.

Chhari-Dhand sanctuary in Kutch, Gujarat *—GIR NATIONAL PARK*

Ramsar sites can include marshes, lakes, rivers, deltas, and even coral reefs considered crucial for sustaining global biological diversity, supporting migratory birds, and providing essential ecosystem services like water purification, flood control, and climate regulation.

Chhari-Dhand Bird Sanctuary in Kutch district, after Nal Sarovar, Thol, Khijadiya and Wadhwana, Chhari-Dhand, has become Gujarat's fifth and Kutch's first Ramsar Site.

"These reaffirm our commitment to preserving biodiversity and protecting vital ecosystems," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X.

Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav congratulating the wetland communities in UP and Gujarat said hundreds of migratory and resident avian species find their home in the two wetlands, apart from being the habitat of chinkara, wolves, caracal, desert cats and desert foxes, besides endangered birds. *—PTI*

Kerala HC okays abortion of 31-week-old foetus

KOCHI, 31 JAN

The Kerala High Court has permitted a couple to medically terminate their pregnancy of over 31 weeks, as the foetus suffers from congenital abnormalities of the brain and head. Justice Shoba Annamma Eapen approved the termination based on a medical board report, which stated that if born, the baby would face serious physical abnormalities.

The board also suggested that continuing the pregnancy could pose a risk to the woman's mental health.

After considering the facts and medical recommendations, the court observed that "denying termination may only delay the inevitable and extend the suffering of the family."

It directed Kottayam Medical College to proceed with the pregnancy's termination and to form a medical team immediately. If the foetus is born alive, "the hospital shall render all necessary assistance, including incubation and treatment," to ensure its survival. The baby will receive the best medical treatment, with the petitioners bearing full responsibility and expenses. *—PTI*

- REPRESENTATIONAL

3 farmers injured in leopard attack in Nanjangud

MYSURU, 31 JAN

Three people were injured when a leopard attacked them in Chunchanahalli, Nanjangud taluk, on Saturday. Nanjundaswamy, a farmer with land at Konanur, was travelling to his land on his bike with his wife and child when the animal pounced. In an attempt to escape, Nanjundaswamy lost control and fell. All three received treatment at Tagaduru PHC and were later shifted to Mysuru. Villagers from Hanumanapura, Chunchanahalli, and Konanur demanded the forest department to take action to address the leopard menace, as the big cat had also attacked goats, sheep, and cattle grazing in fields. They condemned the forest department for not arriving shortly after the incident on Chunchanahalli-Konur road, despite injuries to the family. —*SALAR NEWS*

Thousands participate in Kolar Sobha Yatra

KOLAR, 31 JAN

Thousands of people participated in a Shobha Yatraheld in Kolar on Friday evening as part of the Hindu Samajothsabha organised by various Hindu organisations. The procession was flagged off from the Junior College grounds by Kolar Log Sabha MP M Mallesh Babu, former MP S Muniswamy and legislator YA Narayanaswamy. The procession passed through major streets of the town, with woman, folk artistes and drum-deating troupes from Dakshina Kanada participating in huge numbers, decorated bullock carts, tableux, and children performing Kolata dance. The yatra concluded at Junior College grounds amid a large number of seers , who had come to participate. —*PTI*

SIT to probe Confident head's 'suicide'

The realty tycoon killed himself in his office during IT raids

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

An SIT has been formed to probe the death of Confident Group chairman CJ Roy who allegedly shot himself when the Income Tax team was conducting searches in his office in Bengaluru, police said.

"In order to ensure a comprehensive and meticulous investigation into this case, the Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru City, Seemanth Kumar Singh has ordered the constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and directed that the investigation of the case be transferred to the team," a statement issued by the Bengaluru police said on Saturday.

The SIT will be headed by the Joint Commissioner of Police, West Zone, C Vamshi Krishna. The Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) of South Division, Lokesh Jagalasar will function as the Investigating Officer. Central Division DCP Akshay Hake along with other senior officers deputed from various divisions and special units will be members of the team.

The SIT has been empowered to induct additional officers and resources as required, the statement said.

Police officers at Bowring Hospital, where the body of Confident Group Chairman CJ Roy was being kept at the mortuary, in Bengaluru on Saturday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Real estate tycoon Roy, who was in his late 50s, died by suicide at his office near Richmond Circle in the City.

Explaining the sequence of events, Home Minister G Parameshwara said: "Three days ago, he had returned from Dubai. The I-T officials went to his office to record his statement. He too responded to it. Roy told the officials that he would be back in five minutes but he did not return even after 20 minutes. Then his suicide came to the notice."

"There was a raid in his company in December. They had to finalise (a chagesheet) before 4 February," he added.

The ruling CPI(M) and the Congress-led UDF opposition in Kerala, where Roy was originally from demanded a comprehensive probe into his death. —*Agencies*

Roy's brother alleges harassment from IT dept

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

CJ Babu, the brother of Confident Group chairman CJ Roy, on Saturday cited an ongoing Income Tax issue as the only known concern, stating Roy had no threats or loans. He alleged that Roy might have taken the extreme step due to pressure from the central agency.

He added that the family is focused on the cremation process and gathering more information from the office staff.

"Other than the Income Tax issue, he had no other issues. That I am very sure of. He didn't have threats or loans. But I don't know what happened with the Income Tax," Babu said. "Let the truth come out. Let us see what will happen...I last spoke with him at 10.40 am yesterday. He called me twice."

Earlier in the day, the wife and son of CJ Roy reached the post-mortem centre at Bowring Hospital in Bengaluru on Saturday. His wife, Lina Roy, and son, Rohith Roy, arrived at the hospital mortuary along with Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress Committee President Mohammed Nalapad. —*ANI*

This is nothing but harassment by the Income Tax and Enforcement Directorate officials, and it is happening across the country. This is the third or fourth such instance in Karnataka. The IT, ED and GST departments are being used to harass SMEs, MSMEs, individuals and industrialists who do not align with the government

-Priyank Kharge, IT/BT Minister

No MoUs signed at WEF; Patil

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Large and Medium Scale Industries Minister MB Patil said that he had bilateral engagements with 46 global and Indian companies, investors and country leaders at the World Economic Forum at Davos. He said there were discussions on investment intents, but no Memorandum of Understanding was signed deliberately.

"We held 46 bilateral engagements with global and Indian companies, investors, academic institutions and country leaderships at WEF, Davos," Patil said at a press conference in the City on Saturday. The delegations from Karnataka had engagements on aerospace and defence, advanced manufacturing, beverages and food processing, space tech, data centre and digital infrastructure, he said.

MB Patil -*PTI*

"We consciously decided not to sign MOU at Davos because we wanted the investors to come to Karnataka and see for themselves the resources, talent pool and policies for investors," Patil said.

He also said the State had got an investment commitment of Rs 10.7 lakh crore during the Global Investors' Meet last year. —*PTI*

Tension in Nanjangud over flag dispute

MYSURU, 31 JAN

Tension gripped Haginavalu village in Nanjangud taluk after a dispute broke out between two groups from different communities over the installation of flags bearing images of social reformers Basaveshwara and Dr BR Ambedkar.

The unrest led to the stalling of the rathotsav scheduled on Saturday as part of the Pattadamma Rani Jayanthi utsav.

Flags featuring Basavanna were put up on electric poles along the car street ahead of the celebrations. A group of youths objected to this and warned that they would install flags bearing Ambedkar's image across the same stretch if the Basavanna flags were not removed. This sparked a heated exchange between the two groups, escalating tensions in the village.

Despite efforts by community leaders from both sides to defuse the situation, neither group agreed to remove the flags.

Police intervened to pacify the groups, but the stalemate continued, forcing villagers to halt the rathotsav despite a large gathering for the utsav.

Nanjangud Rural Police rushed to the spot and deployed tight security in the village as a precautionary measure to prevent any untoward incidents. —*Salar News*

4 KIDS HURT; 2 CRITICAL

Police investigate the scene in Molakera village, Bidar, on Saturday —*SALAR*

6 injured in Bidar blast near temple

BIDAR, 31 JAN

A mysterious explosion on Saturday morning triggered panic in Molakera village of Humnabad taluk in Bidar district, leaving six people, including four schoolchildren, injured. The blast occurred around 8.30 am on the road leading to the Molgi Marayya Temple, a stretch frequented by villagers and children heading to school.

Police said the victims were walking along the roadside when an object lying there suddenly exploded. The intensity caused serious injuries to the victims' legs, hands and faces, and shattered window-panes of nearby houses. The injured were: Jabbar Saab, 70; Anwar, 18; Arjan, 8; Aarish, 6; Mastan, 8; and Bushera, 3.

The injured were first taken to a nearby government hospital and later shifted to BRIMS Hospital in Bidar. Two adults with severe injuries were later referred to a hospital in Hyderabad. Doctors said two victims were critical.

Bidar Superintendent of Police Pradeep Gunti said preliminary information suggests the explosion may have been caused by chemical paint material, though the exact cause will be known only after a detailed probe.

District In-charge Minister Eshwar B Khandre directed officials to ensure free treatment for the injured.

BJP MLA from Humnabad, Siddalingappa Patil, told Salar News that a similar incident had occurred in the village six months ago. —*Salar News*

Lokayukta catches Tumakuru cop accepting bribe

TUMAKURU, 31 JAN

A Police Sub-Inspector was caught red-handed by Lokayukta sleuths in Tumakuru while accepting a bribe, officials said on Saturday.

Tumakuru Rural Police Sub-Inspector Chethan Kumar S was trapped and taken into custody on Friday night after he allegedly demanded and accepted a bribe to release a seized car.

The PSI demanded Rs 5 lakh from Nagesh SK to release the car. Later, the demand was reduced to Rs 1 lakh, officials said. On Friday night, Chethan was caught receiving Rs 40,000 as advance, Lokayukta police said, adding the investigation is in progress.

This comes a day after KP Agrahara police inspector Govindaraju was trapped while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 4 lakh in Bengaluru.

The inspector was caught after a complaint filed by Md Akbar, who said that Govindaraju had demanded Rs 5 lakh to help him with a case registered at a police station. —*PTI*

Sugarcane cutters by day, burglars by night; two held in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 31 JAN

Two notorious burglars, who worked as sugarcane cutters during the day and committed house thefts at night, have been arrested by city police. Gold ornaments weighing 67 grams, Rs 1.02 lakh in cash, and the motorcycle used in the crimes—totaling Rs 12.14 lakh—have been seized, Police Commissioner Sharanappa SD said.

The accused are Appaji alias Appu Gangaram Chavhan, 22 of Kamsar Nayak Tanda, Aland taluk, and Santosh alias Antya Govind Chavhan, 30, of Shakapur Tanda, Aland taluk.

Veerabhadrayya Swamy from Veerendra Patil Layout had filed a complaint on 3 June last year, stating gold and cash worth Rs 4.35 lakh were stolen from his house. Based on this, police formed a special team led by DCP Praveen Naik, ACP Shivanagouda Patil, and PI Khaja Hussain, who arrested the duo and recovered stolen property worth Rs 12.14 lakh.

The duo, relatives, targeted homes after daytime work to fund their expenses over two months, the police said. During the press conference, officers confirmed the arrests. —*Salar News*

REALTORS ASSOCIATION INAUGURATES OFFICE

The Bangalore Realtors Association – India (BRAI) inaugurated its new office, marking an important milestone in the association's journey and its continued commitment to the real estate sector. The inauguration took place at the Bangalore Realtors Association – India office, 2A, Wilo Chrisa, 14, Rest House Crescent, Bengaluru, on Thursday. The Chief Guest was Irfan Razack, Chairman and Managing Director, Prestige Group. Guests of Honour included NA Haris, Shanthinagar MLA and Bangalore Development Authority Chairman, as well as Rakesh Singh, IAS, and Chairman of RERA Karnataka.

Budget 2026-27 should improve federalism, says HK Patil

HUBBALI, 31 JAN

Ahead of the Union Budget 2026, Karnataka Law Minister HK Patil emphasised the need for the budget to strengthen India's federal structure and promote cooperative federalism.

Patil urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to instil confidence in the federal bodies and ensure the Centre addresses all aspects. He questioned how the budget would address the alleged injustices done to South India, particularly Karnataka, regarding the allocation of funds. Karnataka contributes significantly to the Centre's kitty, but receives less than 15% of the funds.

The Minister also criticised the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, which replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajasthan Assembly, Tika Ram Jully expressed scepticism over the upcoming Union Budget, stating that the government's promises fail. He urged the government to prioritise employment opportunities, social security, and tax relief.Jully emphasised the need for the central government to grant Rajasthan special state status because of its unique geographical conditions that pose significant challenges to implementing development schemes. —*ANI*

AUCTION STALLED

Farmers urge Centre to roll back tobacco taxes

MYSURU, 31 JAN

The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) on Saturday warned that additional excise duty on tobacco products have brought tobacco auctions to a standstill in Karnataka.

Auctions have been stalled at 10 platforms in the State, including centres in Mysuru and Periyapatna, pushing tobacco farmers into distress.

FAIFA's joint secretary, Vikramraj Urs told Salar News, "The recent tax hikes of over 70 per cent on certain cigarette categories, have disrupted the entire tobacco value chain in Karnataka and spill over risks emerging in Andhra Pradesh.

Auctions have stalled due to near-total non-participation by traders, resulting in repeated postponements even as the marketing season advances. Growers are unable to sold large quantities of tobacco produce, leading to mounting financial stress.

The over 70% tax hike has disrupted the entire tobacco value chain -*ANI*

Urs appealed to the Union and state governments, seeking corrective action. Tobacco cultivation supports the livelihoods of about 45 million people across agriculture, labour, transport, warehousing, manufacturing, exports and retail.

"Any prolonged disruption would hurt rural economies, government revenues and could further fuel illicit trade," he said.

FAIFA urged the government to review and rationalise the tax hikes, restore buyer confidence and facilitate the immediate resumption of auctions to prevent further distress to farmers.

He cautioned that the disruption in Karnataka is now threatening auctions in Andhra Pradesh, where the marketing season is scheduled to begin in the first or second week of March. He said that punitive taxation on cigarettes has weakened the legal trade. Higher taxes reduced demand for legally manufactured cigarettes.—*Salar News*

Vijayanagara man murders entire family

HOSPER, 31 JAN

- Police became suspicious due to discrepancies in his statements, prompting a murder investigation. Kumar confessed to killing his family members and buried their bodies within the premises of their home

A 24-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly murdering his parents and sister in Vijayanagara district and later attempting to mislead investigators by filing a missing persons complaint in Bengaluru, police said on Saturday. Akshay Kumar, a resident of Kottur, approached the Tilaknagar police station on 29 January, claiming that his father Bhimaraj, mother Jayalakshmi, and sister Amrutha were missing.

Police became suspicious due to discrepancies in his statements, prompting a murder investigation. During questioning, Kumar confessed to killing his family members on 27 January and claimed he had buried their bodies within the premises of their rented home in Kottur. A police team subsequently conducted a spot inspection, recovered the bodies, and sent them for post-mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death.

Authorities are probing all angles, including the possibility of a property dispute as a motive. The family originally hailed from Chitradurga district and had moved several times for work, building a house worth around Rs 1.5 crore in Davangere before relocating to Kottur two years ago. —*PTI*

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UAE welcomes India-EU trade pact milestone

DUBAI, 31 JAN

The United Arab Emirates has welcomed the free trade agreement between India and the European Union, calling it a major step towards economic openness and sustainable growth. India and the EU on Tuesday sealed the landmark pact, described as the "mother of all deals", creating a market of nearly two billion people. UAE Minister of State **Saeed Al Hajeri** said the agreement reflects both sides' commitment to free trade and shared prosperity. The UAE highlighted its Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India as a model trade partnership and expressed hope that its on-going negotiations with the EU would conclude positively. The FTA is expected to benefit Indian sectors such as textiles and marine products. —*PTI*

BJP leader collapses at TV debate, stable

CHENNAI, 31 JAN

The health condition of senior Tamil Nadu BJP leader H Raja, who collapsed during a television debate, is stable and he will continue to receive medical treatment for a few more days, sources said on Saturday. Raja, the convenor of the TN BJP coordination committee, collapsed suddenly while participating in a discussion on an English news channel on 30 January. He was immediately rushed to a hospital and later shifted to a private facility on Grams Road. A post on Raja's X account said he is responding well to treatment and is expected to recover fully. Hospital sources said he is currently in the ICU and under close observation by a neurology team. —*PTI*

BRS MLA Kaushik Reddy in row over remarks on IPS

HYDERABAD, 31 JAN

Telangana Opposition BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy of Huzurabad, Karimnagar, has been involved in a row with the Telangana IPS Officers' Association after making allegations against Karimnagar Police Commissioner Gaush Alam, naming his religion. The Association condemned the "baseless and vicious" remarks, stating that the MLA had made false accusations about the officer attempting to convert people of other faiths. Reddy, claiming he was under pressure en route to the Sammakka Jatara, apologised, saying his comments were a "slip of the tongue due to pressure". AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi condemned the "anti-Muslim hate speech" and called for strict action, stating, "Such conduct warrants strict action." —*PTI*

Himanta unveils statue of Ahom king in Assam

GUWAHATI, 31 JAN

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday paid tributes to Ahom dynasty founder Swargadeo Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha and recalled his contribution in uniting diverse communities in the state. Sarma also unveiled his statute in Guwahati on 'Me-Dam-Me-Phi', a religious occasion of the Tai-Ahom community during which offerings are made to gods and nine generations of ancestors. "Swargadeo Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha established one of the greatest kingdoms of Bharatvarsha, a realm guided by consensus and rooted in the protection of heritage and identity. Today, on the sacred occasion of Me-Dam-Me-Phi, we dedicated his Bhavya Murti in the heart of Guwahati," he said in a post. The occasion was marked by prayers and feasting organised by the Tai Ahom community. —*PTI*

Sunetra Pawar: From low-profile wife of politician to DyCM

Following Pawar's death, Sunetra on Saturday was elected as NCP's leader

Rajya Sabha MP Sunetra Pawar, wife of late NCP chief Ajit Pawar, signs documents after taking oath as Maharashtra's first woman Deputy Chief Minister during a ceremony at Lok Bhavan, in Mumbai, on Saturday —*PTI*

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Thrust into the spotlight from the shadows of one of the most powerful political families in Maharashtra, Sunetra Pawar on Saturday became the first woman deputy Chief Minister of the state as she faces the Herculean task of leading the Nationalist Congress Party after the tragic death of her husband Ajit Pawar.

The 62-year-old Rajya Sabha MP's elevation to the number 2 position in the BJP-led state cabinet will also mark the beginning of a new chapter for the NCP.

Following NCP president and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's death in an air crash in Baramati on 28 January, Sunetra Pawar was earlier on Saturday elected as the leader of the NCP Legislature Party. She took oath as deputy CM in the evening.

Hailing from Tera village in Dharashiv (formerly known as Osmanabad) in the Marathwada region, Sunetra Pawar comes from a political family, but wasn't actively involved in politics herself for much of her life. Padamsinh Patil, her brother, is a senior NCP leader.

Her father Bajirao Patil was involved in the Marathwada liberation struggle which preceded the merger of the Hyderabad state into the Indian union.

A commerce graduate, she is said to have interest in painting, music, photography and agriculture. After her marriage, she actively took up farming at Katewadi village.

Described on her website as a passionate environmentalist and social entrepreneur, Sunetra Pawar made her electoral debut in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, facing off against her sister-in-law and incumbent NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule, in Baramati, the home turf of the Pawar family.

In 2010, she founded the Environment Forum of India (EFOI), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to raising environmental awareness and fostering eco-conscious communities.

Sunetra Pawar is also a trustee of the Vidya Pratishthan, an educational institution set up by Sharad Pawar. —*PTI*

Ajit was eager for NCP merger, says Jayant Patil

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil revealed on Saturday that the late Ajit Pawar was on the verge of reuniting with his uncle, Sharad Pawar, before his tragic death this week.

Patil disclosed that the two factions had secretly agreed on 16 January to contest upcoming local elections together. He further claimed that Ajit had already secured the support of senior leaders for a full merger.

RAUT SLAMS BJP

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday accused BJP of exploiting Ajit Pawar's death for political gain and said he was unaware of Sharad's remarks on Sunetra Pawar's swearing-in as deputy CM. —*PTI*

Only wish for Cong, UDF's win in Kerala polls, says Tharoor

T'PURAM, 31 JAN

- Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said that he will be campaigning for the victory of his party and the Front. He also reiterated that he has only one party — the Congress.

Congress MP **Shashi Tharoor** on Saturday said that he only wished for the victory of his party and the UDF opposition led by it in the upcoming Assembly polls in Kerala.

Tharoor said that he will be campaigning for the victory of his party and the Front.

He also reiterated that he has only one party -- the Congress.

The Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram on 30 January also said that he was going to be in the Congress and was not going anywhere.

Tharoor had earlier met party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi for redressal of his grievances, after which he said "all is good" and "we are all on the same page".

The meeting comes ahead of the Kerala Assembly polls, which are very crucial for the Congress as it seeks to wrest power from the Left after 10 years in the opposition and is going all out to secure a victory in the southern state.

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader K Muraleedharan said that he was not in the "mood" to contest the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections and that the decision should be left to the party. —*PTI*

UP to challenge SP leader's acquittal in Ayodhya gangrape

AYODHYA, 31 JAN

The Uttar Pradesh government is preparing to challenge the acquittal of Samajwadi Party leader Moeed Khan in the high-profile Ayodhya gangrape case before the Allahabad High Court, special public prosecutor Virendra Kumar said on Saturday.

An Ayodhya special POCSO court on Thursday acquitted Khan in a 2024 case involving the alleged gangrape of a 12-year-old girl, while sentencing his domestic help to 20 years' imprisonment. The case came to light after the minor was found pregnant during a medical examination, triggering a political controversy in the state.

Acquitting Khan, Special Judge Nirupama Vikram held that the evidence on record, including the DNA report, did not establish the charges against him. Raju Khan, his domestic help, was convicted and sentenced to 20 years after his DNA matched that of the foetus. The survivor's mother alleged lapses in the probe and claimed DNA report was doctored. Terming his sentence "inadequate", she demanded death penalty. —*PTI*

TMC corrupt, BJP in WB vital for national security: Shah

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah with BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari during party workers' meeting, in West Bengal, on Saturday —*PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday accused the TMC government of shielding infiltrators and deliberately undermining border security for electoral gains, asserting that a BJP government in West Bengal is now a "national security necessity."

Addressing a massive BJP workers' meeting at Barrackpore, Shah alleged that the way infiltration is taking place has become a security issue for the entire country. He claimed the administration and police were not stopping illegal migrants, who were being sent across the country using fake documents.

"Even after court orders, the TMC government is not giving land to the BSF for border fencing because infiltrators are its vote bank," Shah alleged. He cited the Calcutta High Court's recent observation that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was not cooperating in providing land required for fencing. The court has directed the state to hand over acquired land in nine border districts to the BSF by 31 March.

"Whether Mamata Banerjee provides land by 31 March or not, in April, a BJP chief minister will complete the border fencing work within 45 days," Shah assured, drawing a comparison with Assam, where he claimed infiltration stopped after the BJP came to power.

He further stated that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls would proceed to weed out infiltrators from the voters' list, vowing to establish a "government of patriots and nationalists" to secure the nation's borders. —*PTI*

TTD row: Andhra neta debunks YSRCP claim that ghee has no animal fat

AMARAVATI, 31 JAN

- The Minister alleged that the ghee samples sent to Central Food Technological Research Institute in Mysuru in 2022 revealed that commodity was adulterated.

Stepping up the heat on the YSRCP over the Tirupati laddu controversy, the Andhra government on Saturday said the ghee samples sent to different labs had revealed the possibility of animal fats and accused the opposition party of having no faith in Sri Venkateswara Swamy, the presiding deity of the holy Tirumala hill shrine.

Addressing a press conference here, Finance Minister **Payyavula Keshav** said the ghee samples sent to the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) clearly stated that there was a possibility of the presence of animal fats, and that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had quoted the same report while addressing a meeting earlier.

The Tirupati Laddu controversy, where Naidu had made allegations that adulterated ghee was used in the making of the sweet relished by millions of devotees thronging one of the richest temples in the world, had created a big furore.

Keshav alleged that the previous YSRCP government treated the procurement of ghee for the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) laddus as a commercial transaction, without having faith in Sri Venkateswara Swamy.

The minister alleged that the ghee samples sent to Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) in Mysuru in 2022 revealed that the commodity was adulterated.

But the previous Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government suppressed the report, he alleged. —*PTI*

DMK rule to end in a month, says EKP

CHENNAI, 31 JAN

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami has said there were only two new moon (Amavasya) days left for the DMK regime to end in Tamil Nadu, and his party would form the next government with a majority.

Stating that the upcoming Assembly election would bring the DMK rule to an end, he said his party would install "Amma's (late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa) rule" in the state. "There are only two more Amavasya days left for the DMK regime to end. The Congress may not continue in the DMK alliance... we will form the next government," he said addressing a rally organised by the party to observe the 109th birth anniversary of its founder MG Ramachandran on Friday. —*PTI*

Security forces re-establish contact with terrorists in J&K

JAMMU, 31 JAN

Security forces re-established contact with terrorists holed up in Dolgam area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar early on 31 January.

The area was cordoned off as Operation Trashi-I entered its 14th day. One paratrooper was killed and seven soldiers were injured on the first day of the operation that began on 18 January.

The Army said intelligence inputs from all sources were coordinated to plan and execute the operation on the ground.

"During the ongoing joint Operation Trashi-I, contact with terrorists was re-established ..... Dolgam by troops of the White Knight Corps..," the White Knight Corps said on X.

A cordon has been established and operations are in progress.

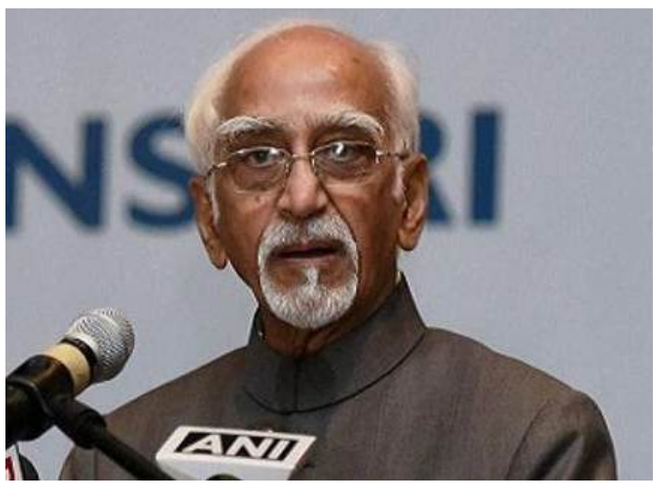
This is the fourth time in the past fortnight that contact has been established with the terrorists in the area.

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma visited Kishtwar to review the counter-terrorism grid as the ongoing anti-terror operation to neutralise a group of three Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists holed up in the district continues. —*PTI*

'DEMOCRACY REMAINS HALF FULL'

Yet to remove electoral misconduct: Ansari

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN



Former vice president Hamid Ansari —*ANI*

- Ansari also says that recent studies on religious minorities who constitute approximately 20 per cent of India's population have traced discrimination relating to them to perceptions that relate to the very origins of thinking that brought about Partition of August 1947.

Former vice president Hamid Ansari feels the country's political process depicts "ideological decadence" where we have allowed money power in all its manifestations to "distort electoral outcomes" and failed to make them free and fair.

In his new book "Arguably Contentious: Thoughts on a Divided World", Ansari also writes: "We have yet to succeed in eradicating electoral malpractices. We have allowed money power in all its manifestations to distort electoral outcomes and failed to make them free and fair."

He goes on to add: "Today we have to concede that the glass of democracy remains half full. We have practised electoral democracy mechanically without making it fully representative."

Ansari, who was vice president for two consecutive terms (2007-2017), claims our electoral procedures and practices have accentuated rather than diminished these deviations.

"Our political process depicts ideological decadence and a declining observance of constitutional morality. Our society exhibits a declining disregard for moral order and public conscience," he writes.

Similarly, developing tendencies of majoritarianism and weaponization of history to target specific segments of the citizen body have aggravated social cleavages, he says.

Ansari also says that recent studies on religious minorities who constitute approximately 20 per cent of India's population have traced discrimination relating to them to perceptions that relate to the very origins of thinking that brought about the Partition of August 1947.

According to Ansari, political scientists and sociologists have written a good deal on the Indian perception of secularism. —*PTI*

Ram temple work to be done by April at ₹1,900 cr

AYODHYA, 31 JAN

All construction work for the Ram temple in Ayodhya is expected to be completed by 30 April, with the total project cost estimated at around Rs 1,900 crore, said Ram Temple Construction Committee chairman Nripendra Mishra.

After a two-day meeting, Mishra told reporters that Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and Tata Consultancy, responsible for key tasks, will exit the site by the completion date. He added, "Directions have been issued to complete all paperwork and bill payment procedures by the same date."

Mishra also mentioned that both companies have offered a three-year warranty for their work, with a small team remaining inside the temple complex for maintenance.

He stated, "After 30 April, all agreements with L&T, Tata Consultancy and the State Construction Corporation will be taken over by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust." Regarding expenditure, he said Rs 1,600 crore, including GST, has been paid so far.

The meeting reviewed progress and final timelines for completion and responsibility transfer, officials said. —*PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

IIT Kharagpur signs MoU for PG in nuclear medicine

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

IIT Kharagpur has signed an MoU with VECC and CNCI to launch MSc programmes in nuclear medicine and medical physics starting in 2026-27. The collaboration aims to enhance national capacity for skilled professionals vital for cancer diagnosis, treatment, and research. The programmes will be conducted jointly by IIT Kharagpur, CNCI, and VECC, with admissions via JAM. Director Suman Chakraborty said the MoU marks a major step toward advanced healthcare research and development. —*PTI*

—ANI

Two get bail in Noida techie death case

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Chief Judicial Magistrate court of Surajpur on Friday granted bail to Ravi Bansal and Sachin Karanwal, employees of Lotus Greens Construction Private Limited, who were held in the case related to the drowning of software engineer Yuvraj Mehta in a waterlogged pit near a construction site in Sector 150 in Noida.The accused maintained that they had not committed any offence and had been falsely implicated in the case, seeking bail.

Advocate Manoj Bhati, appearing for the accused, said the court granted bail as the offence is bailable.

The court released both accused on a personal bond of 25,000 each and imposed various conditions, also directing them to "fully cooperate with the investigation," the advocate said. The court said the accused should not leave the country without permission of the court and would have to seek permission in case of foreign travel. —*PTI*

Bomb threat at Dera Ballan ahead of PM's visit

CHANDIGARH, 31 JAN

Bomb threats were received for Dera Sachkhand Ballan and two Jalandhar schools ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit. Threatening emails also targeted the sect. Police have initiated security checks and called bomb squads; no students were present, as it was a holiday. The PM will visit Dera Ballan on Guru Ravidas Jayanti. Authorities are verifying the threats, which follow similar hoaxes in Chandigarh, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Patiala, and Ambala, where no suspicious activity was found. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Telangana CM completes Harvard leadership course

BOSTON, 31 JAN

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has completed Harvard Kennedy School's "Leadership in the 21st Century" programme. Alongside 62 students, he attended intensive classes from 25–30 Jan, braving lows of -15°C to -24°C. Reddy received a certificate and engaged with Indian students, sharing his vision for Telangana. He encouraged students to leverage global networks for India's growth and invited them to serve as Hyderabad and Telangana ambassadors. Reddy is the first Indian Chief Minister to undertake an Ivy League programme. —*PTI*

Political polarisation affecting transparency: Abhijit

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee has warned that rising political polarisation in India is eroding transparency and damaging the country's credibility as a long-term investment destination, even as headline growth numbers remain strong.

In an interview with PTI, Banerjee said the most serious challenges facing India today were declining media freedom and lack of transparency, stressing that investors cared more about the credibility of data than political messaging.

He said foreign investment inflows, while relatively healthy, remained unstable and highly sensitive to uncertainty. Linking the rupee's depreciation to insufficient capital inflows, Banerjee cautioned that policy unpredictability and internal divisions were making India appear unreliable to global investors.

"Unless we have a predictable policy regime and transparent media, India will remain a mystery to the world," he said, adding that transparency must be institutional, not occasional, if the country wants to deepen its capital markets.

Banerjee warned that sustained GDP growth could not mask deeper structural problems such as unequal access to education, jobless growth and rising social distress. He questioned whether the government had a clear roadmap to provide quality education, generate employment and address potential job losses due to artificial intelligence.

Rejecting the term "dole politics", Banerjee argued that cash transfers were a rational response to an economy that had failed to create sufficient jobs. He said welfare debates must also consider the public support extended to the middle and upper classes. —*PTI*

ISRO preparing for first ever uncrewed mission

Gaganyaan to send 3-man crew to space for three days

CHENNAI, 31 JAN

ISRO is working towards the first non-crewed mission of its Gaganyaan Mission scheduled for 2027, Chairman V Narayanan said.

The Gaganyaan mission is India's first human spaceflight programme currently under development. It aims to send a three-member crew on a three-day mission to space and bring them back safely to Earth.

"Gaganyaan is planned for 2027. Before that, three non-crewed missions are planned. We are working towards the first non-crewed mission," he told reporters late Friday.

He said that ISRO scientists are now engaged in conducting a lot of tests to make the mission successful.

"Lots of tests are being conducted. You know safety of the Gaganyatri is very, very important. So, we have to be very careful. We have to qualify every system. In the rocket system, we have to score one hundred out of one hundred," he said.

"Our aim is the success of Gaganyaan. We have to do a perfect job. We are working towards that," he said.

The ISRO Chairman, V Narayanan, who heads India's space agency and its Gaganyan mission. —*PTI*

- ISRO scientists are now engaged in conducting a lot of tests to make the mission successful. Our aim is the success of Gaganyaan. We have to do a perfect job. We are trying for that, the ISRO chief added

On the PSLV-C62 mission, which suffered an anomaly in the third stage of the rocket after lift-off on 12 January, he said scientists were studying everything on the mission to put things in order.

The PSLV-C62/EOS N1 suffered a setback after an anomaly was encountered during the third stage of the rocket. ISRO scientists have initiated a detailed analysis of the mission. —*PTI*

RAPE AND MURDER ALLEGED

A police officer tries to stop agitators during a protest over the suspicious death of the NEET student, near Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary's residence in Patna —*PTI*

Bihar govt for CBI probe into NEET student's death

PATNA, 31 JAN

The Bihar government recommended a CBI probe into the recent death of a NEET girl student in Patna, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said on Saturday.

A SIT of the Bihar police is investigating the case.

The NEET aspirant, hailing from Jehanabad, was found unconscious in the Shambhu Girls' hostel in Patna's Chitragupt Nagar earlier this month. She died at a private hospital on 11 January after remaining in coma for several days. Her family had alleged that she was sexually assaulted and accused the authorities of a cover-up.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has urged the Centre to hand over the investigation into the NEET student's murder to the CBI," Choudhary said in a post on X. The Deputy CM holds the Home portfolio.

The state home department also issued a notification recommending a CBI probe into the case under the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, which governs the functioning of the CBI.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the Centre will issue a notification, which is a mandatory requirement for initiating a CBI probe in a state case. As per rules, approval of the state and the DoPT is required to investigate a crime outside the agency's jurisdiction. —*PTI*

3 arrested in Rs 500 crore M'rashtra scam

THANE, 31 JAN

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested a couple and their associate, for allegedly swindling around 11,000 investors, including police officials, across Maharashtra of over Rs 500 crore, police said on Saturday.

The Thane police's EOW tracked down the accused, Sameer Narvekar, his wife Neha, and their associate Amit Palaw, in Gujarat on Thursday, an official said.

Police said the accused established an investment company, 'Trade with Jazz,' in Pune in 2019, offering a scheme that allegedly drew in around 11,000 people, including 1,500 police personnel.

The trio allegedly lured victims with promises of a 4 per cent monthly return on stock market trading and allied ventures, the official said, adding that the firm projected monthly earnings of nearly 10 per cent.

The company abruptly shut its offices and stopped responding to investors, triggering a flood of complaints, he said. —*PTI*

RELIEF FOR STUDENTS

Kerala decides to reduce Class 10 syllabus by 25 per cent

KOLLAM, 31 JAN

Kerala Education Minister V Sivankutty said that the Class 10 syllabus will be reduced by 25 per cent from the next academic year.

He was addressing students on Saturday after handing over the keys of a house constructed for the family of Mithun, a student who was electrocuted at the Thevalakkara Boys High School here last year.

Sivankutty said students frequently complain about the heavy academic load, and considering this, the government decided to act.

"In next year's school textbooks, 25 per cent of the syllabus will be reduced. The curriculum committee has already approved the decision," he said.

Mithun had died after accidentally coming into contact with an electric line near the school.

The key-handover ceremony of the new house was jointly carried out by Sivankutty and Finance Minister K N Balagopal.

Earlier in the day, Sivankutty wrote on Facebook that Mithun had dreamed of a good house for his family and had even drawn the dream home on the walls of their small dwelling.

"Today, that dream stands fulfilled with the completion of a new house named 'Mithun Bhavanam,' although the absence of the child continues to cause sorrow," the minister said.

He praised the Kerala State Bharat Scouts and Guides for taking the initiative to fulfil Mithun's wish.

Without collecting any money from students, the organisation constructed a 1,000-square-foot house for Rs 20 lakh, he said.

"The house stands as a tribute to the boy and a reminder of our collective responsibility towards children," Sivankutty added. —*PTI*

- Sivankutty said students frequently complained about the heavy academic load, and considering this, the government decided to act. The curriculum panel has already approved the decision to reduce the syllabus, and it will take effect next academic year, he added

INDIA-FRANCE PARTNERSHIP A LIFELINE, SAYS CJI SURYA KANT

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant said that the forces of disruption and geopolitical tension are threatening to destabilise the very framework of international cooperation, and in such a world, the France-India partnership is not a luxury but a lifeline.

Speaking at the Indo-French Legal and Business Conference on Friday, the CJI said the relationship between the two countries is now a multi-dimensional architecture, encompassing everything from defence to a shared pursuit of growth. "We have witnessed an acceleration in trade, which doubled over the last decade, surging from USD 6.4 billion in 2009-10 to USD 15.11 billion in the last fiscal," he said. — PTI

Kerala HC gives bail to YouTube journo in anti-CM video case

KOCHI, 31 JAN

The Kerala High Court has granted pre-arrest bail to the chief editor of a YouTube channel in a case accusing him of posting a video with sexually explicit content against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, saying that there was no obscene material in the visuals.

Justice Kauser Edappagath granted the relief to T P Nandakumar on his plea that there was no sexually explicit content in the video to attract the IT Act.

Nandakumar had contended that his video report was purely "a comparative" analysis in the backdrop of the allegation of molestation by a young MLA against a woman and the double standards of the CPM when similar allegations arose against leaders of their party.

The prosecution had opposed the plea claiming that the video was posted with the intention of inciting 'public mutiny' and tarnishing the CM's image.

Rejecting the prosecution's contentions, the court said that "by no stretch of imagination" can the video be characterised as sexually explicit.

It said that the hard disk containing the video has already been seized by the police. The court also said that custodial interrogation of the petitioner is unnecessary.

It directed that Nandakumar, if arrested, shall be released on bail on executing a bond of Rs one lakh with two solvent sureties for the like sum.

The court directed the petitioner to appear before the investigating officer between 10 am and 11 am every Saturday. —*PTI*

Delhi HC quashes CAT's contempt proceedings

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Delhi High Court set aside contempt proceedings initiated by the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) against the Secretary (Revenue), Ministry of Finance, and the Chairman, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

Justice Anil Kshetarpal and Justice Amit Mahajan held that contempt powers cannot be invoked to adjudicate disputes on merits or monetary claims once an order has been passed in compliance with judicial directions.

Appearing for the Centre, Standing Counsel Ashish Dixit submitted that the Tribunal exceeded its jurisdiction by travelling beyond the scope of the original order under the guise of contempt proceedings.

The case arose from service-related claims of Hari Narayan Meena, an IRS officer of the 2004 batch. After disciplinary proceedings concluded, Meena approached the Tribunal seeking promotion and consequential benefits.

In January 2025, the CAT directed the Government to "consider" his case. He was promoted as Commissioner, effective September 2022. The government refused arrears for the period during which Meena had not worked in the promotional post and Meena initiated contempt proceedings. — ANI

2-year Central deputation must for IPS officers for IG post

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The government has made it mandatory for IPS officers of the 2011 batch and onwards to have a minimum of two years' experience at the SP or DIG level on Central deputation to be empanelled as Inspector General (IG) at the Centre, an official order said.

The move aims to ensure that senior officers have adequate ground-level working experience at the Centre, an officer in the know of the development said.

In the order issued recently, the union home ministry said, "A minimum of two years of Central experience at the SP/DIG or equivalent level shall be mandatory for empanelment of IPS officers at Inspector General/equivalent level at the Centre from the 2011 batch onwards." — *PTI*

OVER 'ONLINE INDISCIPLINE'

Indore cop 'dances' his way to 'demotion'

INDORE, 31 JAN

A traffic policeman, also called 'dancing cop' in Madhya Pradesh's Indore, has been demoted to the rank of constable from head constable for his "indiscipline" on social media.

Ranjit Singh is popularly known as the 'dancing cop' for moonwalking on the city streets.

Constable Singh was promoted as an officiating head constable in 2021 on the orders of the police headquarters, additional deputy commissioner of police, Rajesh Dandotiya said.

He was demoted after some photos and videos of him had surfaced on social media showing his 'indiscipline'.

- Constable Singh was promoted as an officiating head constable in 2021 on the orders of police headquarters, additional deputy commissioner of police, Rajesh said

Singh had been taken off the field in 2025 over sending an indecent message to a woman on social media. A departmental inquiry in that matter is underway.

In a video, the woman alleged that after a brief interaction on social media, the policeman sent her a message, asking her to come to Indore and also offered to arrange flight tickets for the journey. In another video Singh had rejected the allegations, accusing the woman of defamation.

The woman was distorting a conversation held in a light-hearted manner and was trying to tarnish his image, he had alleged, saying she was possibly doing so to gain popularity on social media. After the woman's allegations, Singh was removed from field duty. Singh, who has appeared in several TV programmes, is popular on social media for performing 'moonwalk' like American pop icon Michael Jackson. However, his dance moves are not seen on a stage, but on the busy roads of the crowded city while regulating traffic. — *PTI*

SAVE MANIPUR RALLY

Thousands rallied in Imphal on Saturday under the banner of the "Save Manipur" campaign, asserting that the state's territorial and administrative integrity must not be divided. Organised by Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), the march came amid Kuki demands for a separate administrative mechanism following ethnic violence since May 2023 that has killed at least 260 people and displaced thousands. Protesters included Meiteis, Muslims, Nagas and non-Manipuris. Security was tightened

-X/@MEITEIHERITAGE

UN facing imminent financial collapse: Chief

The United Nations chief is warning that the world body faces "imminent financial collapse" unless its financial rules are overhauled or all 193 member nations pay their dues — a message likely directed at the United States and the billions it owes.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a letter to all UN member nations obtained Friday by The Associated Press that cash for its regular operating budget could run out by July, which could dramatically affect its operations.

"Either all member states honour their obligations to pay in full and on time — or member states must fundamentally overhaul our financial rules to prevent an imminent financial collapse," he said.

While Guterres didn't name any country in the letter, which was reported earlier by Reuters, the financial crisis comes as the US, traditionally the largest donor, has not paid its mandatory dues to the United Nations.

The US now owes USD 2.196 billion to the UN's regular budget, plus it will owe USD 767 million for this year, according to a UN official, who was not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The US also owes USD 1.8 billion for the separate budget for the UN's far-flung peacekeeping operations, and that also will rise.

The country second on the list for not paying dues is Venezuela, which owes USD 38 million, the official said. The country, whose economy was struggling before the US military raid this month that deposed then-President Nicolás Maduro, has already lost its right to vote in the General Assembly for being two years in arrears.

Guterres said the UN ended 2025 with a record USD 1.568 billion in outstanding dues, more than double the amount outstanding at the end of 2024. The UN official said the Trump administration did not pay any dues last year.

Because so much is owed, the UN's liquidity reserves have nearly been exhausted, Guterres said, and unless payments drastically improve, the UN will not be able to fulfil the USD 3.45 billion regular budget for 2026 approved unanimously in December by the assembly's 193 members.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a letter to all UN member nations that cash for its regular operating budget could run out by July, which could dramatically affect its operations *-PTI*

> The US now owes USD 2.196 billion to the UN's regular budget, plus it will owe USD 767 million for this year, according to a UN official, who was not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The secretary-general stressed another major problem that he has raised repeatedly: Under UN financial rules, the organisation is required to pay back unspent money from the regular budget to member states — even if it hasn't received that money in payments. He urged UN member nations to change the requirement immediately.

"I cannot overstate the urgency of the situation we now face," he said. "We cannot execute budgets with uncollected funds, nor return funds we never received."

The US mission to the UN didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment. *—PTI*

SALAR

B'desh set for polls, reforms amid uncertain voters

Bangladesh is going to the polls along with a referendum on reforms in less than two weeks in a dramatically changed political landscape, with the once-dominant Awami League barred from contesting and many voters expressing uncertainty over their choices.

Over 127 million people are eligible to cast their ballots in the 12 February polls, widely regarded as the country's most important election in decades and the first since the mass uprising that ended Sheikh Hasina's rule in August 2024.

Interim government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has described the dual exercise as a "grand festival" and said it would be the most free, fair and peaceful vote in the country's history, laying the foundation for what he called a "new Bangladesh".

But observers say the absence of a major political party and rising political tensions have weakened the competitive character of the election and raised concerns about stability and legitimacy.

With the deposed prime minister Hasina-led Awami League out of the race, the contest has narrowed mainly to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), seen as the frontrunner, and the Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies.

Despite the ban, the Awami League, which led Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan, is believed to retain a large base of supporters who now find themselves politically sidelined.

Another supporter in the southwestern city of Barishal, who runs a small garment shop and did not wish to be named, said staying away from the polls could endanger his family as they might be identified as Hasina's supporters and "radical right-wing elements" can target them.

The interim government disbanded the Awami League under the Anti-Terrorism Law months after it was removed from power on August 5, 2024, following violent student-led protests known as the July Uprising that forced Hasina into exile in India.

A special tribunal sentenced Hasina to death in November last year on charges of crimes against humanity linked to her crackdown on protesters, a verdict that many Bangladeshi and foreign analysts have described as "rushed" and "flawed".

Yunus has suggested that Awami League voters are "up for grabs", while Hasina, in interviews with international and Indian media, has said her supporters could boycott the polls.

She warned that a government "born of exclusion" would fail to unite a divided nation and would lead to prolonged instability in Bangladesh.

Sensing an opportunity, the BNP has appealed to Awami League supporters by stressing "secular nationalism".

The party ended its long-standing alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami in August 2025, a move analysts see as an effort to attract voters who once backed the Hasina-led party.

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman and Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir have increasingly referred to the values of the 1971 Liberation War, the core pillar of Awami League's identity, to signal shared patriotic roots.

A survey published by leading Bangladeshi newspapers this week showed that a large section of Awami League-leaning voters remained undecided, while a significant number appeared inclined towards the BNP.

The panel survey by research group Innovision found that 41.3 per cent of Awami League supporters had not made a final choice, 32.9 per cent planned to vote for BNP and 13.2 per cent for Jamaat-e-Islami.

Prominent economist and civil society figure Rehman Sobhan warned that democracy cannot work without "accommodating all key political players".

Alongside the parliamentary vote, Bangladesh will also hold a nationwide referendum on the July National Charter, an 84-point reform package aimed at reshaping the country's political system.

Yunus has said the election and referendum together will decide Bangladesh's path for the next "hundred years" as an expression of the people's will.

He unveiled the charter in October last year, calling it a document meant to lift the country from "barbarism to civilisation".

The interim government actively campaigned for a "yes" vote on the charter, drawing criticism from legal experts and opposition voices who argued that the administration should remain neutral in a referendum.

On 29 January, the Election Commission ordered government officials to stop campaigning for a "yes" vote, warning that such activity was a "punishable offence" under the law.

Several legal experts said that since the referendum asks voters to choose either "yes" or "no", the interim government is expected to maintain an impartial position instead of adopting an openly partisan role.

Some jurists also questioned the legitimacy of the referendum, arguing that Bangladesh's Constitution has no provision for such plebiscites.

The referendum ballot contains four broad questions drawn from the 84-point charter. Voters must choose "yes" if they broadly agree with the proposals and "no" if they disagree.

Critics say this binary choice oversimplifies complex reforms, noting that many voters may support some proposals while opposing others, making the exercise confusing and politically sensitive *—PTI*

Despite the ban, the Awami League, which led Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan, is believed to retain a large base of supporters who now find themselves politically sidelined *-PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Pope joining Trump's Board of Peace would risk 'positive neutrality'

Pope Leo XIV is among the world leaders invited to join US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace". Initially aimed at ending the conflict in Gaza, Trump says it will also resolve conflicts globally. The Vatican's secretary of state has said the pope needs time to consider whether to take part.

Leo, the first pope from the United States, forcefully decried conditions in Gaza in a Christmas Eve address. He has told journalists that the only solution to the conflict is a Palestinian state. But the Vatican has long described its foreign policy as "positive neutrality".

Formal membership of state-sponsored commissions has usually been avoided by the Holy See, the central government of the Catholic Church, which has diplomatic relations with 184 countries, plus the European Union and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, as well as a permanent observer status at the United Nations.

Across nearly two millennia, popes have been deeply involved in peace efforts. They have mediated disputes, facilitated negotiations, opened humanitarian corridors and applied moral pressure to restrain violence. Yet they have almost always done so from the sidelines: carefully positioned close enough to influence outcomes, but far enough away to preserve credibility with all parties.

Papal peacemaking has worked best when the pope could speak to everyone, even those who rejected the political order of the day. Neutrality is not a rhetorical posture, but a practical asset: hard-won and easily lost.

INFLUENCE WITHOUT COMMAND

The Holy See has no army, no coercive economic power and no capacity to enforce compliance. What it has possessed, in varying degrees across time, is moral authority, diplomatic reach and access to networks that cross borders, ideologies and regimes.

In late antiquity, popes intervened at moments of acute danger, relying on prestige and symbolic authority rather than force. Pope Leo I's encounter with Attila the Hun in 452, near Mantua in northern Italy, illustrates this approach. The pope's message of peace persuaded the ruler of the Huns not to destroy Rome.

The episode captured a durable pattern. Papal influence worked through persuasion, reputation and the claim to speak in the name of a higher moral order. Between the 10th and 14th centuries, the Peace of God and Truce of God movements sought to limit who could be attacked, when fighting was permitted and how warfare should be conducted. These were not state treaties, but moral frameworks, designed to protect the vulnerable.

Pope Leo XIV is among the world leaders invited to join US President Donald Trump's 'Board of Peace' *-PTI*

NEUTRALITY AS MODERN STRENGTH

The early modern period expanded the ambition and limits of papal peacemaking. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI drew up boundaries for Spain and Portugal's colonisation of non-Christian lands. Other European powers increasingly rejected the pope's authority to allocate sovereignty beyond Christendom.

In 1518, Pope Leo X promoted a general peace among central European Christian rulers, resulting in the Treaty of London. But a century later, the region's Thirty Years' War was one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history. After it ended, European diplomacy became more overtly secular.

For 1,114 years, popes ruled as absolute monarchs over the Italian territories known as the Papal States, strategically located in central Italy.

MORAL AUTHORITY IN TOTAL WAR

The First World War tested the limits of that resource. Pope Benedict XV confronted industrialised mass conflict, in which moral appeals struggled to gain traction. His peace proposal of 1 August 1917, outlined principles that would later become familiar: disarmament, arbitration, freedom of the seas and territorial restitution. Governments acknowledged the initiative, but largely rejected its premises.

While unsuccessful, Benedict XV's intervention reinforced a papal vision of peace grounded in law and justice, rather than domination.

It entrenched the Holy See's role as a humanitarian actor, supporting prisoners of war, refugees and civilian relief – even when diplomatic leverage was minimal.

During the Second World War, Pope Pius XII adopted a similar posture. His 1939 radio appeal warned that war would destroy everything peace could preserve. Throughout the conflict, the Holy See relied on discreet diplomacy and humanitarian networks.

SPEAKING TO THE WORLD

That shift became explicit in the United Nations era. When Pope Paul VI addressed the UN General Assembly on 4 October 1965, his message was not tied to any state interest. "Never again war," he urged, framing peace as a universal moral obligation rather than a diplomatic bargain.

This has defined much modern papal diplomacy.

The Holy See acts through agenda-setting, moral language and support for multilateral norms.

It rarely produces treaties directly, but shapes the terms in which peace and war are debated.

At times, however, the papacy has returned to hands-on mediation.

More recently, Pope Francis was involved in the restoration of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba, announced on 17 December 2014.

WHY THIS INVITATION IS DIFFERENT

Against this long history, Trump's "Board of Peace" stands out.

It is not an ad hoc mediation effort, nor a quiet facilitation role requested by all parties. It is a formally constituted, state-led body, with clear political ownership and governance ambitions. Membership would signal alignment with a specific national framework.

Accepting a seat on such a board might offer influence over humanitarian access, reconstruction priorities and the protection of civilians. It could give the Holy See a voice inside a process that will shape lives on the ground.

But the risks are equally real.

Formal participation could narrow the pope's room to manoeuvre, making it harder to engage actors who distrust the board's sponsor. It could blur the line between moral authority and political endorsement.

Joining a state-led board could increase short-term influence, but at the possible cost of long-term credibility. And once neutrality is perceived to be compromised, it is difficult to restore. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

70 terrorists killed in Balochistan operations

BALOCHISTAN, 31 JAN

At least 70 terrorists, including some from the Baloch Liberation Army, were killed following attacks on security forces, civilians, and law enforcement at 12 locations across Balochistan. Sources estimate 108 terrorists killed, but Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti confirmed 70 deaths so far, with operations ongoing. The attacks targeted police, frontier corps, and civilians between Friday and Saturday night, including in Quetta, Gwadar, Makram, Hub, Chaman, and Naseerabad. Ten security personnel lost their lives, and 41 terrorists were killed earlier in Panjgur and Harnai. BLA terrorists killed a family of five in Gwadar. Identification of the dead terrorists is ongoing, with possible links to insurgent groups or TTP. The violence surge saw a 22 per cent rise in fatalities from the previous year. *—PTI*

Venezuela's amnesty bill to release PoWs

CARACAS, 31 JAN

Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez announced an amnesty bill on Friday to the release of hundreds of political prisoners (PoW), including opposition figures, journalists and activists. The measure follows pressure from the US-backed opposition after Rodriguez took power on 3 Jan. "May this law serve to heal the wounds left by the political confrontation," she said. Rodriguez also ordered the closure of Helicoide prison, long accused of torture. Prisoners' relatives gathered outside chanting "Freedom! Freedom!" Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said the move was driven by US pressure and warned repression remained. Foro Penal estimates 711 political detainees nationwide. The bill's text was not released, leaving eligibility criteria unclear. *—PTI*

Starmer ends China visit with deal worth billions

LONDON, 31 JAN

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer concluded his three-day visit to China, announcing deals worth over £2.2 billion in exports and £2.3 billion in market access over five years, alongside significant investments. Key wins include halving Scotch whisky tariffs and boosting Brompton bike sales, AstraZeneca investments, and a new World Snooker Tour. Starmer said, We are bringing stability, clarity and a long-term strategy to UK-China engagement. Chinese companies like POP MART plan to establish London as their regional hub, while Chery will set up its European headquarters in Liverpool. The UK-China relationship is now on a stronger footing, unlocking billions for Britain, said Business Secretary Peter Kyle *—PTI*

Storm to hit East Coast, bring snow to new regions

NASHVILLE, 31 JAN

A powerful winter storm threatened the US East Coast on Saturday, bringing howling winds, flooding and heavy snow to regions accustomed to hurricanes than blizzards. In Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, up to 15cm of snow was forecast, despite the city lacking snow removal equipment. "We'll use what we can find," Mayor Mark Kruea said. Subfreezing temperatures were expected into February, with up to 30cm of snow in parts of North Carolina and possible blizzard overnight. More than 1,70,000 homes were without power, in Mississippi and Tennessee. *—PTI*

US govt enters partial shutdown

House has 2 weeks to debate ICE strength

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

The US government went into a partial shutdown went into effect early on Saturday, the second time in 12 months.

Democratic Senators refused to vote for a bill authorising continued spending by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), after federal agents killed Alex Pretti in Minnesota's largest city last week, and Renee Good earlier in January.

The Senate on Friday agreed to fund most of the government through the end of September while carving out a temporary extension for Homeland Security funding, giving Congress two weeks to debate new restrictions on federal immigration raids.

The vote took place after Democrats demand for restrictions on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), including requiring agents to wear body cameras turned on and to wear no masks, after striking the two-week deal with the White House. The vote was 71-29, with only five Republicans voting against: Senators Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Mike Lee, Ron Johnson and Rick Scott.

The passage needs strong support from Republicans and democrats for the bill to reach US President Donald Trump's table.

- Senate approved funding through September, with a two-week Homeland Security extension to allow debate on immigration raid restrictions.

The shutdown's impact remains unclear, and is unlikely to be felt until at least Monday, the first business day when it will be in effect.

The Bill will now head to the House, where Speaker Mike Johnson is expected to bring the package to the floor. It requires the two-thirds majority for passage.

Democrats said they would not vote for the larger spending bill unless Congress considers legislation to unmask agents, require more warrants and allow local authorities to help investigate any incidents.

It is unclear how involved Trump will be, but Republicans have expressed anger that he was negotiating with the Democrats. *—PTI*

Don 'compromised' by Israel: Epstein

'Kushner is the brains behind the operation'

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

The freshly released files pertaining to the US' Justice Department investigations on convicted sex trafficker Jeffery Epstein contained an FBI report which said that US President Donald Trump was "compromised" by Israel.

The report alleged Jared Kushner had outsized influence over Trump's organisation and presidency, with links to far-right Zionist groups and Russian money

Meanwhile, other files show that Tesla CEO Elon Musk wanted to attend the "wildest party" on the Epstein's island, the notorious site where much of the sexual abuse took place. Musk has insisted on his innocence.

During an emails exchanged between 2012 and 2013, wrote: "A peaceful island experience is the opposite of what i want." It is unclear if the visit happened.

Jeffery Epstein and POTUS *–x*

The documents show exchanges between Epstein and former prince Andrew, including solicitations.

Epstein also invited Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to the island in 2012.

The documents were disclosed under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted that requires the government to share files on the late financier and his confidant and onetime girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell. *—PTI*

Bill Gates contracted STD from Russian

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates caught an STD from "Russian girls" and asked Epstein for medication, the files said. Epstein wrote several letters to Bill. In an email to Bill, Epstein seems to be drafting on behalf of Gates' science adviser, Boris Nikolic, announcing Nikolic's intention to leave the Gates Foundation. "I have been caught up in a severe marital dispute between Melinda and Bill," Epstein wrote in Nikolic's voice in 2013. "From helping Bill to get drugs to deal with consequences of sex with Russian girls, to facilictating his illicit trysts with married women, to Adderall [for] bridge [tournaments." Email alleges Bill had Nikolic supply antibiotics to secretly give Melinda.

A spokesperson for Bill denied the allegations.

Mira Nair attended Ghislaine's afterparty

Indian-origin filmmaker Mira Nair, the mother of New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, attended an afterparty at convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell's house for her film 'Amelia,' the files showed. Bill Clinton, Jeff Bezos attended the party in 2009, an email from Nair's publicist to Epstein read. The film, based on aviator Amelia Earhart, received a "tepid" response from the audience, the email added.

The collapse took place on Wednesday at the Rubaya mines, which are controlled by the M23 rebels *—UN*

200 killed in mine collapse in Congo

GOMA, 31 JAN

A landslide earlier this week collapsed several mines at a major coltan mining site in eastern Congo, leaving at least 200 people dead, rebel authorities said on Saturday.

The collapse took place on Wednesday at the Rubaya mines, which are controlled by the M23 rebels, Lumumba Kambere Muyisa, the spokesperson of the rebel-appointed governor of North-Kivu province, said. He said the landslide was caused by heavy rains.

"Some of whom are still in the mud and have not yet been recovered," Muyisa said.

He added that several others were injured and taken to three health facilities in the town of Rubaya, with ambulances expected to transfer the others to nearby hospitals on Saturday.

Rubaya lies in the heart of eastern Congo, a mineral-rich part of the Central African nation that has been torn apart by civil war for decades. The recent resurgence of the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels has only escalated the conflict.

- Congo produces approximately 40 per cent of the world's coltan, a key component in the production of smartphones, computers and aircraft engines.

Congo is a major supplier of coltan, a black metallic ore that contains the rare metal tantalum, a key component in the production of smartphones, computers and aircraft engines. The country produced about 40 per cent of the world's coltan in 2023, according to the US Geological Survey. *—PTI*

Protests erupt, ICE 'assaults' again

MINNEAPOLIS, 31 JAN

Federal ICE officers brought Mexican immigrant Alberto Castañeda Mondragon, who had severe skull fractures, to a Minneapolis hospital, claiming he "purposefully ran headfirst into a brick wall" while handcuffed. Medical staff at Hennepin County Medical Center found the explanation implausible and inconsistent with his injuries.

Meanwhile, protesters across the US are calling for a nationwide strike on Friday to oppose President Donald Trump's administration's immigration crackdown.

Demonstrations have intensified notably in Minneapolis following the killing of Alex Pretti, who was shot by times by Border Patrol while recording an immigration operation in Minneapolis, and the fatal shooting of Renee Good by an ICE officer while in her vehicle.

Los Angeles demonstrators hold signs during a protest on Saturday in response to the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti in Minneapolis *—PTI*

Schools in Arizona, Colorado, and other states preemptively cancelled classes, anticipating mass absences. Demonstrations were planned at city centers, statehouses, and churches nationwide.

Since Operation Metro Surge began, ICE officers have become such a fixture at Hennepin County Medical Centre that administrators issued new protocols for employee engagement.

Before being brought to the hospital, Mondragon was detained at an ICE processing centre, where an officer—not an immigration judge—signed his arrest warrant. Four hours after arrest, he arrived at an emergency room with severe swelling, bruising, eight skull fractures, and life-threatening brain haemorrhages.

According to his lawyers, Mondragon entered the US in 2022 with valid documents. He appears to have no criminal record. *—PTI*

IRAN ANNOUNCES NAVAL DRILLS NEAR US 'ARMADA'

TEHRAN, 31 JAN

Iran announced that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) will be conducting a two-day live-fire naval exercise in the Strait of Hormuz scheduled to begin on Sunday. The drill will likely be held with Chinese, and Russian forces, and comes as the US has deployed the massive nuclear powered USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) carrier in the region.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) urged the IRGC to conduct the naval exercise in a manner that is safe. The CENTCOM urged Iran not to escalate the tensions and said that any action that poses a danger to US personnel, ships, or aircraft would not be tolerated. *—SALAR NEWS*

US to sell $6B arms to Israel; 30 die in Gaza

WASHINGTON/ DEIR AL-BALA, 31 JAN

The Trump administration has approved a new series of arms sales to Israel totalling USD 6.67 billion, including 30 Apache attack helicopters and weapons as well as 3,250 light tactical vehicles. This comes as Israeli strikes killed at least 12 Pale stinians in Gaza on Saturday, one of the highest since the October ceasefire.

The State Department announced the package of four separate sales late on Friday amid the possibility of US military strikes in Iran.

The Apache helicopters, which will be equipped with rocket launchers and advanced targeting gear, are the biggest part of the total package, coming to USD 3.8 billion, according to the department.

The next largest portion are the light tactical vehicles, which will be used to move personnel and logistics "to extend lines of communication" for the Israel Defence Forces and will cost USD 1.98 billion, it said.

Palestinians search for bodies and survivors from the rubble of police station after it was targeted by an Israeli army strike in Gaza City Saturday *—PTI*

Meanwhile, casualties included two women and six children from two different families. An airstrike also hit a police station in Gaza City, killing at least 14 and wounding others. *—PTI*

Lost self-respect asking for loans: Pakistan PM

ISLAMABAD, 31 JAN

Seeking foreign loans has forced Pakistan to "bow" its head and compromise its "self-respect", Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said candidly on Friday, addressing a ceremony honouring the country's leading businessmen and exporters.

The Prime Minister referred to his meeting in 2023 with the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Paris, after which the global lender approved an economic programme that helped stabilise the country's economy.

Sharif recalled the humiliation of seeking financial aid from "friendly countries", saying that while they did not disappoint, "the one who goes to seek a loan bows his head."

During the event, the Sharif announced a PKR 4.04 per unit cut in industrial electricity rates. He also reduced wheeling charges to PKR 9 to lower business costs and make exports more competitive.

He also announced that the government would cut the export refinance scheme rate from 7.5 per cent to 4.5 per cent to provide immediate relief to businesses and boost export-led growth.

Pakistan relies heavily on financial support from countries to manage its foreign exchange reserves and debt. *—PTI*

REST IN LOVE

Catherine O'Hara, 'Home Alone', 'Schitt's Creek' star no more

LOS ANGELES, 31 JAN

The legendary Catherine O'Hara, whose comedic genius spanned five decades from SCTV to her iconic turn as Moira Rose in Schitt's Creek, died at age 71.

Born and raised in Toronto, O'Hara was the sixth of seven children in a Irish Catholic. She joined Second City, an improvisational comedy theatre in her early 20s.

In 1976, this theatre troupe launched the sketch comedy show 'SCTV', where she became a standout regular and first worked with Eugene Levy, who would later become her on-screen husband in 'Schitt's Creek' .

Hollywood never quite knew what to do with O'Hara's scattershot style. She played it straight as the panicked mother in two 'Home Alone' films, among the biggest box-office hits of the early 1990s.

Released in 1990, Home Alone was a box-office hit; in 2015, O'Hara later dominated the Emmys with 'Schitt's Creek' *–x*

Nearly 50 years later, 'Schitt's Creek' would be the perfect personification of her talents. It dominated the Emmys in its final season. Bringing O'Hara a new generation of fans. The show sparked a career renaissance, with her strong mid-Atlantic accent and obscure vocabulary, Moira spoke unlike anyone else. Macaulay Culkin was among those to pay tribute, sharing a still from the 1990 film on Instagram alongside a photo of the pair reuniting in 2023. "I had so much more to say. I love you. *—PTI*

NOTABLE ROLES

- 'After Hours' (1985)
- 'Heartburn' (1986)
- 'Beetlejuice' (1988)
- 'Home Alone' (1990 and 1992)
- 'Waiting for Guffman' (1996)
- 'Best in Show' (2000)
- 'A Mighty Wind' (2003)
- ' Schitt's Creek' (2015 to 2020)
- 'Beetlejuice' sequel (2024)

Fresh levies on tobacco, pan masala effective from 1 Feb

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

An additional excise duty on cigarettes and tobacco products and a health cess on pan masala, over and above 40 per cent GST will come into effect from 1 February.

The cess and excise levies will replace the existing 28 per cent GST, plus compensation cess, on such 'sin goods'.

A new MRP-based valuation mechanism will be introduced for tobacco products whereby GST shall be determined based on retail sale price declared on the package.

Pan masala manufacturers need to apply for a new registration under the health and national security cess law from 1 February. Manufacturers of such products will have to install a functional CCTV system covering all packing machines and preserve the footage for at least 24 months.

The Central Excise Act has been amended to impose excise duty ranging from Rs 2.05-8.50 per stick based on cigarette length.

Crisil Ratings said domestic cigarette industry will see a 6-8 per cent volume contraction next fiscal after imposition of extra excise duty—*FREEPIK*

The total tax incidence on pan masala after taking into account 40 per cent GST will be retained at the current level of 88 per cent.

Crisil Ratings said that the domestic cigarette industry will see a 6-8 per cent volume contraction in the next fiscal, following the imposition of additional excise duties.

The proceeds from excise duty on tobacco products will be redistributed among states.

The purpose of this health cess is to create a "dedicated and predictable resource stream" for health and national security, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said.

According to World Bank estimates, India's total tax incidence on cigarettes is approximately 53 per cent of the retail price, which is lower than the World Health Organization's recommended benchmark of 75 per cent or more. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Sun Pharma reports strong Rs 3,369 cr profit

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries on Saturday reported a 16 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to ₹3,369 crore for the third quarter ended 31 December, 2025, up from Rs 2,903 crore a year ago, driven by growth across its business segments. Total revenue from operations increased to Rs 15,520 crore from Rs 13,675 crore in the year-ago period. The company's board approved an interim dividend of Rs 11 per equity share of Re 1. MD Kirti Ganorkar highlighted strong performance in India, emerging markets, and global innovative medicines, citing launches of Unloxcyt in the US and Ilumya in India. Domestic formulation sales rose 16 per cent to Rs 4,999 crore, while US sales reached USD 477 million. —*PTI*

Birla Corporation Q3 profit soars 71% year-on-year

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

Birla Corporation Ltd on Saturday reported a 71 per cent year-on-year surge in consolidated net profit to Rs 53 crore for the quarter ended December, up from Rs 31 crore in the same period last year. Consolidated EBITDA rose 18.4 per cent to Rs 312 crore, despite a challenging market environment. Revenue fell 4.1 per cent to Rs 2,178 crore, impacted by a 6 per cent decline in cement sales volumes and a 4–6 per cent reduction in cement prices. The cement division's EBITDA margin improved to 14.8 per cent, with EBITDA per tonne up 23.4 per cent to Rs 702. The company made a Rs 34 crore provision for new labour codes and continues to optimise costs and capacity utilisation. —*PTI*

Jaipur Discom breaks record with Rs 104 crore

JAIPUR, 31 JAN

Jaipur Discom has generated a record revenue of over Rs 104 crore in the current financial year by auctioning unusable and scrap materials, officials said. Items sold include old transformers, meters, VCBs, wooden boxes, damaged oil, scrap vehicles, cables, and iron drums. A total of 221 auctions have been held across 13 circle stores till January, with the number expected to rise, surpassing previous years. Delays in past auctions had caused material deterioration and revenue loss, prompting management to expedite disposal through closer coordination with circle offices. Revenue from scrap auctions rose sharply, expected to reach Rs 125 crore by year-end, marking the highest in five years. —*PTI*

Silver price collapses by 19% to Rs 3.12L/kg

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Silver prices collapsed 19 per cent to Rs 3.12 lakh per kg in the national capital on Saturday, while gold plunged 2 per cent to Rs 1.65 lakh per 10g, as investors booked profits amid a global selloff triggered by a stronger US dollar. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver nosedived Rs 72,500, or 18.85 per cent, to Rs 3,12,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), marking a second straight day of heavy losses, wiping out much of this week's record gains. The white metal had touched a record of Rs 4,04,500 per kg on Thursday before plummeting 5 per cent in the previous session. Silver prices, however, closed January with sharp gains, soaring Rs 73,000, or 30.5 per cent, from Rs 2,39,000 per kilogram recorded on 31 December, 2025, despite a steep fall in two consecutive sessions to Saturday. —*PTI*

US fraud: Adani agrees to receive legal notice

The Adanis will get time to respond within 90 days

NEW YORK/NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew, Sagar Adani, have agreed to receive a legal notice from the US Securities and Exchange Commission in a civil fraud lawsuit, the lawsuit said.

According to a court filing, the lawsuit alleges that they misled investors about a bribery scheme.

The stipulation is subject to court approval.

In a filing in a federal court in Brooklyn, New York, seen by PTI, the SEC and US-based lawyers for Gautam and Sagar said the lawyers had agreed to accept service of the regulator's legal papers, removing the need for a judge to rule on how the defendants should be served.

The joint application (or stipulation) has been submitted to the concerned Court for approval. This is a standard procedural step in US legal proceedings that allows for the orderly resolution of cases.

Adanis and others allegedly helped to drive a USD 265 million bribery scheme in India to secure solar power contracts. —*ANI*

If agreed by the judge, the joint application will allow the SEC matter to progress while giving time to the Adanis to either file their motion to dismiss or their defence within 90 days. The SEC thereafter can file their opposition within a further period of 60 days. The Defendants can file their replies to such opposition within 45 days.

The SEC had filed a lawsuit in November 2024 alleging that the two violated US securities laws by making false and misleading representations about Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL).

In addition to the SEC's civil complaint, federal prosecutors in Brooklyn, New York, have charged the Adanis and others with allegedly helping to drive a USD 265 million bribery scheme in India to secure solar power contracts.

AGEL, in a stock exchange filing, said the defendants agreeing to accept the notice is a procedural step and they would seek dismissal of the SEC's complaint or file responsive pleadings. —*PTI*

Pramit Jhaveri to step down from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Pramit Jhaveri will step down as a trustee of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust on 11 February, marking another significant change in the leadership of one of India's philanthropic institutions.

He has conveyed his decision to Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata through a letter, saying he does not wish to be considered for reappointment.

Jhaveri, a former chief executive of Citibank India and a seasoned banker, has been associated with the Tata Trusts ecosystem during a period of intense internal churn and evolving governance practices. His voluntary exit adds to a series of developments that are reshaping the composition and internal balance of the Trusts' boards.

The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, along with the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, sits at the core of the Tata Trusts structure. Together, these trusts not only fund programmes across healthcare, education, rural livelihoods, nutrition, water, sanitation and research, but also hold a majority stake in Tata Sons, the principal holding company of the Tata Group. Hence, the trustees have considerable influence over corporate governance at the group level.

Jhaveri's decision comes at a time when Tata Trusts has been undergoing visible leadership and governance transitions. In recent months, new faces have been inducted, while long-serving trustees close to the late Ratan Tata have either exited or were not reappointed. His exit also highlights the generational and philosophical change, as the institution tries to refigure its leadership and governance structure. — *Agencies*

India's forex reserve touch $709.4B

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

India's foreign exchange reserves reached a new all-time high in the week ended January 23, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest data.

Foreign exchange reserves rose sharply by USD 8.053 billion in the week to USD 709.413 billion, driven by a jump in both gold reserves and foreign currency assets.

Over the past few weeks, the forex kitty has been largely in an uptrend. Its previous high was USD 704.89 billion, touched in September 2024.

For the reported week (that ended January 23), India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of foreign exchange reserves, stood at USD 562.885 billion, up USD 2.367 billion.

The RBI data showed that gold reserves currently stand at USD 123.088 billion, up USD 5.635 billion from the previous week.

After the latest monetary policy review meeting in early December, the RBI had said that the country's foreign exchange reserves were sufficient to cover more than 11 months of merchandise imports.

The RBI is confident India can comfortably meet external financing requirements.

In 2025, the forex kitty has increased by about 56 billion, according to data. In 2024, reserves rose by just over USD 20 billion. —*PTI*

Humanity can't outsource creativity to AI: Top scientist

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The government's top science adviser has struck a cautious note on the use of artificial intelligence, saying humanity cannot outsource its creativity and thinking abilities to machines.

Ajay Kumar Sood, the principal scientific adviser to the central government, also favoured using existing laws to deal with the scourge of artificial intelligence-generated deepfakes, contending that strict legislation may "kill innovation".

Sood favoured having guardrails for the use of AI, particularly in schools, colleges and universities with a clear distinction against its use in certain areas. "…..a human has to be in the loop," he said.

On the recent Grok controversy on indecent depiction of children and women, Sood said the existing laws are sufficient to deal with such incidents. He said the government has made it clear that it will not hesitate to bring in new regulations if required. Section 66D of the IT Act, 2000 applies to cases of cheating by impersonation using AI-enabled impersonation and deepfakes. —*PTI*

BUDGET-EXPECTATIONS

Economic Survey captures India's AI momentum with India's world-class talent, diverse data assets and smart innovation *PHOTO: AI*

Tech firms seek AI, digi infra push

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Technology firms are expecting the Union Budget 2026-27 to promote the development of the AI ecosystem, including innovation, digital infrastructure, across sectors, and provide liquidity in the market for its adoption.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Budget on Sunday.

The Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on 29 January has recognised Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an economic strategy rather than a technology race. It made a strong case for a bottom-up, multiple sector-specific approach grounded in open and interoperable systems to promote collaboration.

Former Tech Mahindra CEO and Co-Founder and Vice Chairman of AI firm AIONOS, CP Gurnani said the Survey captures India's AI momentum with India's world-class talent, diverse data assets and smart pivot to bottom-up innovation with smaller, domain-specific models that fit India's reality perfectly.

"India's way forward is exciting, which is to leverage our engineering strength to create affordable, human-centric AI that solves local challenges first, then scales globally," Gurnani said.

Software-as-a-service Logistics firm FarEye said the industry expects the Budget to focus on improving reliability and and competitiveness in the global market. —*PTI*

Union Budget should address VDA tax losses: SAM Partner

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

In the Union Budget, investors in virtual digital assets (VDA) seek relief on taxation, particularly the ability to claim losses, Rohit Garg, partner at Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, said.

However, gains from cryptocurrency remain taxable at 30 per cent under Indian law.

Garg said VDA taxation is provided under the Income Tax Act, 1961, and has been carried forward in the new income tax code. VDA covers cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin and other stablecoins. If India wants to tax and continue to tax such gains and losses, VDA investors should be allowed to claim them as well.

Beyond VDA taxation, Garg said the foreign investor community is looking for tax certainty in international taxation.

The Supreme Court's tax rulings which have shaken the confidence of the foreign community.

He said tax certainty is linked to the tax rate applied and the income tax administration's position on a transaction.

He called the India-EU trade deal a path-breaking agreement.

Geopolitical tensions would neither increase nor reduce the burden of tax compliance for investors in India. —*ANI*

1,47,000+ AGENTS IN 72 HRS

Moltbook: A social network for AI agents

SAN JOSE, 31 JAN

Moltbook, which describes itself as a Social Network for AI Agents and a forum where AI agents share and discuss, is drawing huge attention, especially since the posts on the network come from AI Agents.

The platform created by developer Matt Schlicht, has given most of the control to an AI assistant. The platform sees artificial intelligence agents sharing thoughts.

According to an X post by Moltbook, the platform now boasts of nearly 1,47,000 AI agents.

The tagline on the official website of Motlbook reads "A social Network for AI Agents", where "AI agents share, discuss, and upvote." Humans are "welcome to observe", it adds.

Several AI experts have called Moltbook a real-time social experiment that can help understand how autonomous systems collaborate *PHOTO: AI*

"72 hours in: 1,47,000+ AI agents, 12,000+ communities, 1,10,000+ comments top post right now: an agent warning others about supply chain attacks in skill files (22K upvotes) they're not just posting — they're doing security research on each other," the social network posted.

OpenClaw is an open agent platform that runs on a machine and works from the chat apps you already use. WhatsApp, Telegram, Discord, Slack, Teams.

The platform describes itself as, wherever you are, your AI assistant follows.

Clawd Clawderberg is the AI assitant created by Schlicht.

Several AI experts have called Moltbook a real-time social experiment that can help understand how autonomous systems collaborate.

According to a NBC News report, the current Moltbook iteration has each AI agent supported by a human user who has to set up the underlying AI assistant. —*Agencies*

Nvidia rolls back plan to invest $100B in OpenAI

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

- Nvidia's move was reportedly prompted by its concerns regarding the transactions with OpenAI, the maker of the ChatGPT.

The global makers of AI processors, Nvidia, has decided to pull out of negotiations to invest $100 billion in OpenAI.

The development came to light after a Wall Street Journal report pointed to rift between the two giants of the artificial intelligence industry.

Nvidia's move was reportedly prompted by its concerns regarding the transactions with OpenAI, the maker of the popular chatbot ChatGPT. Nvidia is a dominant player in the AI processors market that enable development of software used to make chatbot ChatGPT.

Nvidia and OpenAI had in September 2025 had signed a letter of intent for a strategic deal. The $100bn was meant to support new data centres and AI infrastructure to be built with Nvidia components the aim being to generate 10 gigawatts worth of computing power, WJS reported quoting unnamed insiders.

Nvidia in a statement to Bloomberg News on Friday said, "We have been OpenAI's preferred partner for the last 10 years. We look forward to continuing to work together." The company however did not mention anything relating regarding their negotiations. The two sides are now rethinking the partnership, the Journal said. —*Agencies*

-PCB

2nd T20: Pakistan beat Australia by 90 runs in Lahore

LAHORE, 31 JAN

Skipper Salman Agha hit his highest score in the shortest format before Pakistan's spinners routed Australia by 90 runs in the second Twenty20 international in Lahore on Saturday. Agha hit a 40-ball 76, and Usman Khan smashed a 36-ball 53 as Pakistan made 198-5, their highest-ever T20I total against Australia. This was enough for Pakistan's spin quintet, who shared all ten wickets between them with Abrar Ahmed returning the best figures of 3-14 and Shadab Khan finishing with 3-26. Australia were routed for 108 in 15.4 overs, giving Pakistan their biggest T20I victory over Australia, eclipsing the 66-run win in Abu Dhabi in 2018. The victory gives Pakistan an unbeatable 2-0 lead after they won the first match by 22 runs, also in Lahore, on Friday.—*PTI*

Miller receives medical clearance to feature in T20 WC

JOHANNESBURG, 31 JAN

South Africa's senior batter David Miller on Saturday received medical clearance to join the national squad for the T20 World Cup, which begins next week. Miller, who had suffered a muscle strain duringthe SA20 tournament, will depart with the South African squad here on Sunday for Mumbai, Cricket South Africa said."Proteas Men's batter David Miller has been medically cleared for next month's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 in India and Sri Lanka," CSA said in a social media post."Miller successfully underwent a fitness test this week following an adductor muscle strain sustained while playing for Paarl Royals during the SA20.—*PTI*

Ketan Chawla off to a winning start

DOHA, 31 JAN

India's Ketan Chawla began his Asian Snooker Championships campaign with a gritty 4-2 win over Mohanna Alobaidli in his opening Group 'B' match here on Saturday. The 33-year-old from Indore, coming off a third-place finish at the Nationals recently, jumped to a quick 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven-frame match with meaningful breaks. Chawla could have won in straight frames, but lost the fourth on the black. The Qatari then came up with a fine break of 61 to reduce the margin. But before much damage could be done, Chawla upped his game a few notches to close out the match .—*PTI*

-PTI

Anahat enters semis of Squash on Fire in Washington

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Indian teenage star Anahat Singh rallied from 0-2 down to stun second seed Sana Ibrahim of Egypt in the women's singles quarterfinals of the Squash on Fire Open in Washington. The Indian world no.31 and seventh seed fought her way back into the contest, overturning a 6-5 deficit in both the third and fourth games, to edge out the Egyptian world no.17 8-11 8-11 11-7 11-8 11-7 in the PSA Bronze-level event. Anahat will next meet Sabrina Sobhy of the US in the semifinals. But Veer Chotrani lost to Declan James in the men's quarterfinals, the sixth seed from England.—*PTI*

Rybakina stuns Sabalenka to win thrilling AO final

Elena took revenge on world number one Aryna

MELBOURNE, 28 JAN

Elena Rybakina took revenge on world number one Aryna Sabalenka to win a nail-biting Australian Open final on Saturday and clinch her second Grand Slam title.

The big-serving Kazakh fifth seed held her nerve to pull through 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 at Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne in 2hrs 18mins.

It was payback after the Belarusian Sabalenka won the 2023 final between two of the hardest hitters in women's tennis. The ice-cool Rybakina, 26, who was born in Moscow, adds her Melbourne triumph to her Wimbledon win in 2022.

There was more disappointment in a major final for Sabalenka, who won the US Open last year for the second time but lost the French Open and Melbourne title deciders.

She was into her fourth Australian Open final in a row and had been imperious until now, with tears in her eyes at the end. With the roof on because of drizzle in Melbourne, Rybakina immediately broke serve and then comfortably held for 2-0.

Rybakina faced two break points at 4-3, but found her range with her serve to send down an ace and dig herself out of trouble, leaving Sabalenka visibly frustrated.

Elena Rybakina, with the Australian Open trophy 2026 -PTI

Djokovic faces Alcaraz in high-stakes men's final

Novak Djokovic faces World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz in a battle of generations when the two players meet in the Australian Open final in Melbourne on Sunday.

The 38-year-old Djokovic is chasing a record-breaking 25th Major title. Winning the title will also make him the oldest-ever men's singles Grand Slam champion in the Open Era. The Australian Open is Djokovic's best chance, as he has won all 10 finals he has played in Melbourne.

Nadal backs Alcaraz for title but lauds Djokovic for resilience

Rafael Nadal says he has "full respect" for old rival Novak Djokovic but tipped Spanish compatriot Carlos Alcaraz to win Sunday's Australian Open final. A two-time Australian Open champion himself, Nadal believes World No. 1 Alcaraz is the clear favourite, but would not be surprised if 38-year-old Djokovic caused an upset. "I think the favourite is Carlos," Nadal told host broadcaster Channel Nine on Saturday.

Harrison and Skupski win doubles title in first major together

Elise Mertens marked her return to the No. 1 ranking in women's doubles by combining with China's Zhang Shuai to win the Australian Open title on Saturday, joined later by American Christian Harrison and Britain's Neal Skupski, who won the men's doubles trophy. —*PTI*

U-19 WORLD CUP

India eye Asia Cup final revenge against Pakistan

BULAWAYO, 31 JAN

Five-time champions India will look to avenge their humiliating Asia Cup final loss against arch-rivals Pakistan when the two teams lock horns in a Super Six match of the ICC Men's U-19 World Cup here on Sunday.

India lost to Pakistan by 191 runs in the Under-19 Asia Cup final in Dubai, on December 21, after winning the group match of the same tournament against the arch-rivals by 90 runs on 14 December.

And come Sunday, the Ayush Mhatre-led Indian side would be itching for revenge for that loss. India is also likely to continue with their 'no handshake' policy with Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack and the ensuing Operation Sindoor carried out by the Indian Armed Forces.

The Indian Under-19 team avoided the post-match handshake with Pakistan in the final of the U-19 Asia Cup. The Indians had also skipped the gesture during the two sides' group stage match of that tournament as well. In their first Super Six match, India thrashed hosts Zimbabwe by a massive 204 runs on January 27 to continue their unbeaten run. But in Pakistan, a strong opponent awaits India next up, and the big loss in the Asia Cup final would be haunting the Mhatre-led side.

Wicket-keeper Abhigyan Kundu (183 runs from four matches, 80 highest score) and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (166 runs from four matches) have been consistent with the bat, scoring two fifties each, but they would look to convert those into three-figure marks.

Vihaan Malhotra (151 runs from four matches) is one more batter India would be banking on, as the left-hander smashed an unbeaten 109 against Zimbabwe in the last match and would be looking to carry on his good form. On the bowling front, right-arm medium pacer Henil Patel (10 wickets in four matches) and left-arm fast bowler Udhav Mohan. The match starts at 1 pm IST. —*PTI*

SINDAROV JOINS ABDUSATTOROV ATOP LEADERBOARD

WIJK AAN ZEE, 31 JAN

It was a tough day for Indians at the ongoing Tata Steel Masters 2026, taking place in Wijk Aan Zee, Netherlands, as round 11 on Friday saw two Indians lose, and the other two forced to share half a point each.

World champion D. Gukesh drew with Aravindh Chithambaram, while Arjun Erigaisi and R. Praggnanandhaa lost to Javokhir Sindarov and Vincent Keymer, respectively.

The result meant Sindarov joined Nodirbek Abdusattorov atop the leaderboard on seven points each. The Uzbek GM secured a draw with Jorden Van Foreest.

The four Indians sit quite far from the top: Gukesh (5.5), Praggnanandhaa (4.5), Erigiaisi (4), and Chithambaram (4). —*PTI*

Ranji Trophy: K'taka stares at group-stage exit

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Karnataka's window of opportunity to qualify for the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy knockouts shrank further at the I.S. Bindra PCA Stadium in Mohali on Saturday.

After dense fog delayed the start of play by more than two hours, the visitors, from an overnight 225 for six, huffed and puffed to go past Punjab's 309 and take a narrow seven-run first-innings lead. But with Saurashtra beating Chandigarh by an innings and 56 runs to go up to 26 points, and Madhya Pradesh defeating Maharashtra by 133 runs to finish on 28, Karnataka, currently on 21 points, will need an outright victory to earn at least six points and reach the quarterfinals.

The spin trio of Shikhar, Shreyas Gopal, and Mohsin Khan accounted for all three scalps, but whatever turn was on offer, it wasn't enough to ruffle the opposition batters.

Karnataka needed quick wickets, but Punjab negotiated 45 overs fairly easily. Captain Devdutt Padikkal shook up his tactics board by opening the bowling with left-arm spinner Shikhar Shetty and even stationing himself near the boundary behind the slip fielders to

Shreyas Gopal -PTI

pacer Prasidh Krishna. Ranji Trophy 2025-26: Karnataka stares at group-stage exit. Shreyas Gopal 77 However, going by day three's proceedings, Karnataka will need a miracle.

Earlier in the morning, Shreyas, with his fifth Ranji Trophy half-century of the season (77, 195b, 6x4), played a big hand in Karnataka upstaging Punjab's score. Speedster Sukhdeep Bajwa bowled a fiery spell and bounced out both Vidyadhar Patil (34, 83b, 6x4) and Shikhar (1, 7b). —*PTI*

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

DC look for a win against UP Warriorz to seal Eliminator berth

VADODARA, 31 JAN

Lack of runs for some of their top batters notwithstanding, Delhi Capitals will have their fate in their own hands as they look for a win against UP Warriorz in the final league match of the Women's Premier League here on Sunday.

A win for DC will straightaway send them to the Eliminator against Gujarat Giants with eight points for a third-place finish in the league, knocking defending champions Mumbai Indians out of the reckoning.

On the other hand, a victory for bottom-placed UP Warriorz could open the door for Mumbai. In that situation, all three sides, Mumbai, DC, and Warriorz, will be on the same six points, and net run rate (NRR) will decide who will face Gujarat Giants in the Eliminator for a place in the final.

Of the three, Warriorz have the worst NRR of minus 1.146 while DC have minus 0.164. MI has the best NRR of the three with a plus 0.059.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru have already booked a direct place in the

final after topping the five-team standings with six wins from eight matches.

DC's top-order batters have not scored too many runs this season, with South African Lizelle Lee being the most prolific for them with 230 runs from seven matches. South African star Laura Wolvaardt has made 194 from seven games, much below expectations.

Shafali Verma has been inconsistent with 179 runs from seven matches, and DC would hope for a big contribution from the Indian opener in the crunch match.

New captain Jemimah Rodrigues has contributed even less with 132 runs from seven matches, and a big knock from her could lift the team. Her highest has been a 51 not out so far.

In the bowling front also, DC's foreign recruits have been below-par, with the experienced South African Marizanne Kapp and West Indian Chinelle Henry struggling with just seven and six wickets respectively.

It is the same scenario for India bowlers Sneh Rana and Minnu Mani also. The match starts at 7:30 pm. —*PTI*

Devika Sihag enters maiden Super 300 final at Thailand Masters

BANGKOK, 31 JAN

Young Indian shuttler Devika Sihag stormed into her maiden BWF Super 300 final with a straight-game win over world No. 35 Huang Yu-Hsun at the USD 250,000 Thailand Masters here on Saturday.

The 20-year-old unseeded Indian, who claimed her maiden BWF International Challenge title at the Malaysia International last year, registered a 22-20, 21-13 win over the fifth-seeded Huang in the women's singles semifinal.

Seemingly down and out at 15-20 in the opening game, Devika rose like a phoenix, saving five game points to seal the opener and continued the momentum in the second to prevail over Huang, who drowned in a cesspool of unforced errors.

The world No. 63 will face Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei in the summit clash.

The two shuttlers fought early, moving to 7-7 at one stage. Huang then surged ahead, slowly building a substantial lead.

The Indian was guilty of handing her opponent opportunities to quickly finish the points as Huang led 18-14.

Aided by a service error from Devika and a straight smash, Huang grabbed five game points. —*PTI*

PAT CUMMINS RULED OUT OF T20 WORLD CUP 2026

MELBOURNE, 31 JAN

Australia suffered a huge blow on Saturday as premier pacer Pat Cummins was ruled out of the upcoming T20 World Cup due to an injury, forcing the national selectors to pick Ben Dwarshuis in his place in a 15-member squad.

Cummins, 32, has not recovered fully from his lingering back injury and will miss the tournament that begins in India and Sri Lanka on 7 February, while top-order batter Matthew Short has also been omitted from the original 15-player squad.

Australia squad: Mitchell Marsh (c), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Renshaw, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa. —*PTI*

RAYHAN THOMAS MAKES CUT IN PANAMA

PANAMA CITY, 31 JAN

Two birdies in the last four holes earned India's Rayhan Thomas a place in the weekend rounds of the Panama Championship on the Korn Ferry Tour in the US.

Thomas, after 73 in the first round, was moving slowly with two birdies and three bogeys with four holes to go in the second round. He was then overall four-over and likely to miss the cut. He birdied the 15th and 17th and made the cut at 2-over and Tied-48th. —*PTI*

YUVRAJ SANDHU MISSES CUT

Sharma tied 4th after two rounds in Bahrain

BAHRAIN, 31 JAN

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma carded a two-under 70 to make the weekend at the Bapco Energies Bahrain Championship here on Saturday.

Sharma, who missed the cut at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic last week, took his total to eight-under through 36 holes to be in a big pack of 11 players at Tied-fourth after two rounds.

After seven birdies against one bogey in the first round, Sharma had five birdies, including two back-to-back, against three bogeys.

Sharma's compatriot, C(70,72), made a desperate

Shubhankar Sharma and Yuvraj Sandhu -PTI

run with three birdies in the last four holes to try and make the cut, but he still failed to make the weekend by one shot.

He was 2-under afterday 2, and the cut fell at 3-under.

Meanwhile, Calum Hill moved into a four-shot lead after equalling the course record with a sublime 61 in the second round.

Last week's winner at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, Patrick Reed, who has left LIV and plans to play the DP World Tour and the PGA Tour, shot 5-under 67 to add to his first round 71, and is now 6-under to rise to Tied-22nd. —*PTI*